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Studies in Islamic Historiography

Essays in Honour of Professor Donald P. Little

Edited by

Sami G. Massoud



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Cover illustration: Fol. 1b of al-Yūsufī's (d. 759/1358) *Nuzhat al-nāẓir fī sirat al-Malik al-Nāṣir*. Donald P. Little was the first scholar to identify the text of this manuscript as al-Yūsufī's as it was tucked away in Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umarī's (d. 749/1349) *Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār* (MS Ayasofya 3434, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Istanbul). My thanks go to Frédéric Bauden for suggesting this image as a suitable cover for this Festschrift and for making it available to me.

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This book is dedicated to my parents, my mother, the late Joséphine, and my father, Gibrān al-Khūrī Mikhā'il Massoud. I owe them much of what I am and what I have achieved. I also dedicate it to my family, my wife Ann and my beloved children Julia and Nicolas.

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Abbreviations

<i>BSOAS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
<i>EI²</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , second edition, ed. P.J. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs, 12 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1960–2004.
<i>EI³</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , third edition, ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Everett Rowson. Leiden: Brill, 2011–.
<i>Elr</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia Iranica</i> , vol. i–, London 1982–. Online http://www.iranicaonline.org/ .
<i>JA</i>	<i>Journal Asiatique</i>
<i>JESHO</i>	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
<i>JMIS</i>	<i>Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies</i>
<i>MSR</i>	<i>Mamlūk Studies Review</i>

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Introduction

Sami G. Massoud

When my friend and colleague Dr. Charles Fletcher came up with the idea of a *Festschrift* to honor Donald P. Little, I initially hesitated. The *Mamlūk Studies Review*, under the aegis of Bruce Craig of the University of Chicago, had already dedicated an issue of the journal to celebrate this man, who had devoted most of his career to the study of the Mamlūk Sultanate in Syria and Egypt (1256–1517). As a scholar of Islamic history and civilization during his long career at the Institute of Islamic Studies of McGill University in Montreal, Donald P. Little left behind a considerable *œuvre*. He also supervised numerous theses and dissertations on topics other than Mamlūk history; these ranged from early Islamic history to Islam in Indonesia. With this in mind, I proposed the idea of a *Festschrift* to deal with a variety of topics, all historical, to be chosen by contributors whose research Little either directed or influenced. Given the potential breadth of these topics and the publisher's interest in a book with a more circumscribed focus, I took the decision to produce a volume on Islamic historiography, the subject to which Donald P. Little accorded most of his scholarly attention, starting with his work, *An introduction to Mamlūk historiography*.

I place in the hands of readers a collection of nine essays written by former students and colleagues to honor the long-time achievements of Donald P. Little and, after his departure from this world, his memory and legacy. These essays vary in terms of topic, time, place, and focus, but they all inform us about aspects and dimensions of Islamic historiography. In fact, their very diversity, ranging from a study of a Sinicized biography of the Prophet written in seventeenth-century Qing China by a Chinese Muslim to an assessment of tenth-/sixteenth-century Ottoman legal records as a source for historical inquiry, begs the question: What is historiography? It is the production, per se, of works that deal with a given historical period and provide information about it, for example, the historiography of the 'Abbāsīd period, and also, as in the case of this volume, the study of this production, its nature, methodology, themes, techniques, etc. In this sense, all the papers in this volume constitute historiographical studies.¹

1 For a systematic survey of the debates surrounding the epistemology of historiography, I direct readers to Zagorin's *History* and his exchanges with F.R. Ankersmit and others; see Zagorin, *Historiography* and Ankersmit, *Reply*.

The headings of this commemorative work are based on the topics of their authors. Three of these fall under the heading **Classical Historiography**. This refers to the production of historical works in Arabic that narrate events that took place in the past, from the hands of recognized authors belonging to identifiable traditions of writing who lived in the Arab heartland of the medieval Islamic world. Wood's paper deals with an event in the 630s, the fall of city of Amman to Muslim conquerors, and puts into focus the origins of historical writing about and during the early history of Islam. The event predates all others that are discussed or touched on in this *Festschrift* (Ma Zhu's biography of the Prophet is a retrospective revisiting of past events produced in the later part of the eleventh/seventeenth century); it occurred during the period that witnessed the rise of the Prophet and the heroic age of Islam. Interestingly, we have no significant written record from this foundational era, save for the Quran. To put this hiatus in perspective, recall Maxime Rodinson's words in the preface of his biography of Muḥammad, that "[l]es plus anciens textes que nous possédions sur la vie du prophète remontent à cent-vingt-cinq ans après sa mort" and that these cite "sources (orales pour la plupart) plus anciennes [qu']ils prétendent remonter à des témoins oculaires des événements."² Therefore, whatever information can be gathered from this period has undergone a two-tiered or even a three-tiered process. A case in point is Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767), the author of a biography (*sīra*) of the Prophet. To produce his work, Ibn Ishāq relied on the reports (*akhbār*) of the firsthand witnesses alluded to by Rodinson which were gathered by intermediaries such as 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr (d. 93/711–2 or 94/712–3) and al-Zuhri (d. 124/742) before they reached him. Ibn Ishāq's *sīra*, however, has not come down to us as it was written, but through Ibn Hishām's (d. 213/828 or 218/833) edited abridgment of a recension made by al-Bakkā'i (d. 183/799).³ Wood does not engage with this earliest stage of historical production, but he does examine that which we might label the second wave of histories, those written in the late third/ninth and early fourth/tenth centuries. These constitute the "culmination of historical writing in early Islam" as they synthesized "a vast corpus of narratives which had been collected and put into circulation over the previous 200 years ... [and] defined the religious and political meaning of these narratives in a manner that later Muslims found nearly definitive for many

² Rodinson, *Mahomet* 13.

³ Robinson, *Islamic historiography* 25. The reports pertaining to the rise of the Prophet and heroic age of Islam are the subject of a debate concerning their historicity and validity as a true rendition of events past. For an overview, see Donner, *Narratives* 1–33.

centuries.”⁴ Clearly, the conquest of Amman predates the production of such luminaries as al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and al-Balādhurī (d. c. 279/892), but the chronicles of these two authors, as well as the narratives of geographers Wood used, to a large extent reflect the available knowledge at that time about the subject. His interest is in whether or not there is concordance between these sources and the archaeological evidence regarding the oft-repeated Orientalist assertion of the destruction and disappearance of civic life in Byzantine towns in Syria following the Arab invasions.

Empey introduces readers to two historiographical traditions produced during eventful periods of Islamic history, from the fifth/eleventh to the ninth/fifteenth centuries: in the East (al-Mashriq), the defeat of the crusades, the age of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and the Mamlūks, and the Mongol onslaught; and in the West (al-Maghrib), the rise of sectarian ‘revivalist’ movements among the Berbers, and the resurgence of the Reconquista. She does so within the framework of a curious historiographical riddle related to the abolishment by ‘Abd al-Mu’min b. ‘Alī I-Kūmī (487–558/1094–1163), the Muwaḥḥid caliph in North Africa, of the *dhimma* pact that gave Christians and Jews the status of protected minorities. Sources produced in the Arab East mention this event that took place in the West, while sources from the West essentially ignore it. Her endeavour leads her to investigate the narratives related to this event primarily in the works of historians who lived at the time of the Ayyūbids (566–658/1171–1260) and the Mamlūks (658–922/1260–1516); during this period, historiography matured, developed, and assumed new forms and styles. This was the era of universal chronicles, dynastic and local histories, and massive biographical dictionaries written by the likes of Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233), Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī (d. 654/1256) (to whom we owe the popular technique of including biographies of important people alongside historical annals), al-Dhahabī (673–748/1274–1348), al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442), Ibn Taghrī Birdī (d. 874/1469–70) and others. Empey’s piece is both a clarification of a historical riddle of significant importance—the fate of religious minorities in North Africa at the turn of the sixth/twelfth century—and an exploration of the works of these authors, in an effort to assess the reason for this hiatus in the rendering of historical events.

4 Unless otherwise specified, the information in this and the following paragraph is based on the *Ta’rikh* article in *EI*², principally the sections by Humphreys, 271–275. Readers interested in a more comprehensive and complete discussion of Islamic historiography in Arabic should turn to the following three classic works, by no means the only ones, and those mentioned by this writer and individual contributors in their bibliographies: in chronological order of publication, Humphreys, *Islamic history*, Khalidi, *Arabic historical thought*, and Robinson, *Islamic historiography*.

Bauden's paper is pure historiography, in that he focuses on a single work, a biographical dictionary written by an important ninth-/fifteenth-century historian of the Circassian Mamlūk period (784–922/1382–1516), namely, al-Maqrīzī's *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr al-muqaffā li-Miṣr*. Bauden scans the works of the author's students and contemporary scholars for their recollections about his biographical dictionary; he identifies his sources; he follows the trail of the various copies of the text across time and space; and he studies the physical aspects of the extant manuscripts and extracts information from them. He does this in order "... to bring *al-Muqaffā* into the limelight by providing a holistic analysis of its history in the broadest sense, i.e., from its inception up to its distribution, in particular, [the author's] intention in composing such a biographical dictionary and its place in the schedule of his work." Bauden's essay is a true work of historiographical archaeology.

Mengüç's research diverges from the two previous essays. Here we are dealing with a new historiography. It is Islamic in the sense that it relates the events of Muslim actors, though their feats were performed at the periphery of Arab and Persian urban civilisations. It inaugurates a tradition of historical writing, first in Persian and then in Turkish, that developed and flourished in later centuries. This tradition saw the light in the turbulent times that followed the momentous event of the Turkish conquest and settlement of Anatolia. The battle of Manzikert (463/1071) was followed a century later by that of Myriokephalon (572/1176), in which the Byzantines were defeated at the hands of the then recent newcomer Turkish Saljūqs and the Saljūq sultanate of Rūm, respectively. These defeats transformed parts of Asia Minor into a land of marches where Byzantines, *ghāzīs* (warriors for the faith), Armenians and others, battled. It is in this context that Osman (d. c. 724/1324), whose ancestors had apparently arrived there during the first three decades of the seventh/thirteenth century (as part of yet another migration of Turkmen⁵ from Central Asia fleeing the gathering storm of the impending Mongol onslaught), founded his eponymous *beylik* in the early eighth/fourteenth century. Tucked away in the northwestern corner of Anatolia, under Osman and his successors, the Ottoman statelet gathered strength and power, defeated its rival *beyliks*, unified Asia Minor, expanded its territory, conquered Constantinople and, despite a multitude of vicissitudes (not least among them the crushing defeat in 804/1402 of Sultan Bayezid I (r. 791–804/1389–1402) at the hands of

5 Here Turkmen refers to nomadic and semi-nomadic Turkish-speaking populations, as opposed to urbanized elements of the population.

Timūr (d. 807/1405), the conqueror from the steppes, established a world empire and a seat for orthodox Islam.⁶

To a large extent, Ottoman historiography, which began in the ninth/fifteenth century, mirrors the changing fortunes of the Ottoman state and reflects the tension inherent in such a metamorphosis. On the one hand, historians had to take into account the Turkish actors who spearheaded the conquest and settlement of Anatolia from the end of the fifth/eleventh century onward. These were essentially Turkmen tribesmen led by tribal *begs* and dervishes, the latter 'shaman'-type *babas* or itinerant mystics of a heterodox bent.⁷ On the other hand, they had to accommodate the requirements of a more sanitized version of history, one that featured the Ottoman sultans as upholders of orthodox Sunnī Islam. Mengüç analyzes two narratives of Ottoman origins that mirror this tension. One is represented by Ahmedī's (c. 814/1412) *İskendername*, a work composed in verse and catering to the elites of an orthodox Ottoman sultanate, increasingly removed from its origins (that is, as a state peopled by Turkmen *ghāzīs* supporting themselves through raiding activities). The other is embodied by the anonymous *Tevārīḥ-i Āl-i 'Osmān*, which, as Mengüç notes, was "neither a palace-oriented nor a eulogistic text," but rather, originally, an oral history widely known in the popular sections of Ottoman society. From the interplay of these two came about what ultimately constituted the history of the early Ottomans as it was perceived and understood by later historians of the dynasty.

Under the heading **Sacred History**, I have collected those essays that deal with histories that differ in style and purpose from those that fall within the realm of classical historiography. These are the repositories of the distinct sectarian and group identities of people who were either on the fringes of the Muslim heartland (Chinese Muslims in Park's "From a Persian Barbarian") or minorities (albeit a large one, as in the case of Indian Muslims, in MacLean's "Shaping a Millennial Historiography") in their Islamic milieus (the Fāṭimids in Egypt in Virani's "Hierohistory"). These narratives also take place on planes different from those of classical historiography. The demarcation between the two is sometimes hard to define, since classical historiography contains a fair share of legendary material, whether stories of pre-Islamic prophets or narratives of the miraculous in Prophet Muḥammad's life, but this material is

6 On the milieu that witnessed the birth and rise of the Ottomans and the historiographical debates concerning it, see Kafadar, *Between two worlds*, Balivet, *Romanie*, and the two classics Köprülü, *Les origines* and Wittek, *The rise*.

7 On the early Turkish invaders of Anatolia and their society, see Mélikoff, *Le problème*; Cahen, *Le problème du Shī'isme*; and Ocak, *La révolte*.

significant. Some surveys, such as Robinson's seminal *Islamic historiography*, refrain from touching on sacred history, for example, the texts in which Ismā'īlīs expound their views about the cyclical nature of history. Evidently, this demarcation can be rendered immaterial by assuming, as do post-modernists, that all historical texts are essentially literary productions that can be analyzed with the tools of literary criticism.⁸ One might also find solace in the fact that some surveys, such as Khalidi's *Arabic historical thought in the classical period*, do consider sacred history as worthy of inquiry. Khalidi surveys the legends about pre-Islamic prophets and says that Ismā'īlism "has offered what was probably the most epochal scheme of history ever produced by Arab-Islamic culture."⁹

Ultimately, for someone like the present writer, who closely follows the unfolding of the terrible war on Syria and the conflict in Iraq, the discourses about controversial events of the first century of Islam one often finds expressed by warring parties tell us a lot about the way history is perceived *in actuality*. Whether or not there is clear evidence to support the eventual reappearance of the awaited Mahdī of the Twelver Shī'īs or, for that matter, that of the Messiah, the rise of clerics in Iraq claiming that they are acting on the command of the Mahdī and the fanaticism displayed by some evangelicals in their support for Zionism in their haste to precipitate the coming of the Messiah, are indications of the importance of history as it is lived. Sacred history falls well within the purview of historiographical inquiry.

The mention I have made of Shī'ism in the preceding paragraph is not fortuitous. Hierohistory, a key element in Virani's article, is one the foundations of Shī'ism in general and of Ismā'īlism in particular. It refers to history as a series of cycles of prophecy, some preceding the predication of the Prophet Muḥammad and thus involving biblical figures such as Jesus and Mary, but reaching their culmination with the advent of the Qā'im who is from the progeny of Muḥammad and 'Āli by means of Fāṭima, Muḥammad's daughter and 'Āli's wife. This is "a history," says Corbin "... which does not consist in the observation, recording or critique of empirical facts, but derives from a mode of perception that goes beyond the materiality of empirical facts."¹⁰ On the level of *lived* experience, writing about Christianity, Versluis describes hierohistory as "[t]hose exact moments of revelation in an individual life when the eternal and the temporal intersect."¹¹ When speaking of the second occultation of

8 On the debate concerning post-modernism and the study of history, see the sources cited on 1 n. 1.

9 Khalidi, *Arabic historical thought* 68–73, 160–2.

10 Corbin, *History* 61.

11 Versluis, *Wisdom's children* 4.

Muḥammad, the awaited Mahdī and the inheritor of the mantle of the imamate from his father, al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī (d. 260/874), the eleventh Imam of the Twelver Shīʿīs, Corbin says “[t]his was the beginning of the secret history of the twelfth Imām. To be sure, it has nothing to do with what we call the historicity of material facts; nevertheless, it has dominated [Twelver] Shiite consciousness for more than ten centuries—indeed it *is* the history itself of this consciousness.”¹² To explore their hierohistory as well as other truths about their faith, Virani explains that the Ismāʿīlis had recourse to the science of symbolic interpretation, known as *taʿwīl*. This type of interpretation allowed them to uncover the hidden esoteric meaning of the Quran, of which ʿAlī and his progeny of imams are the true interpreters. In his essay, Virani examines how one of the principal Ismāʿīli intellectuals of the Fāṭimid period, Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān (d. 363/974), accounted, by means of *taʿwīl*, for the birth of Jesus as it is related in the Quran. Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān’s interpretation of the birth of Jesus, which Virani translates into English, is significantly different from the way either Christians or most other Muslims have construed it. The actors of the drama assume new hidden identities and the drama itself a new meaning.

MacLean examines another region of the Islamic world, on its periphery geographically speaking, yet an area with one of the highest concentrations of Muslims in the world: the Indian subcontinent. Since the early second/eighth century and the occupation of Sindh by Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim (d. 96/715), India has been an integral part of the Islamic world; this was even more true after the conquest of northern India by Turkish warriors and the later establishment of the Delhi Sultanate (608–963/1211–1556). Thereafter, India became, until the end Mughal rule in 1857 at the hands of the British, an important and indispensable participant in the elaboration of Persianate civilization. The latter, using Persian as the medium for written productions (with the exception of the religious sciences, where it coexisted with Arabic), whether history or poetry, thrived in the Persian-speaking world proper but also in India and many regions of Central Asia ruled and/or inhabited by Turks. MacLean’s research delves into a by-product of Indo-Persianate culture, a *sīra* of Sayyid Muḥammad Jawnpūrī (d. 910/1505), the founder of the Mahdaviyya movement.¹³ His essay is significant on a number of accounts. It informs readers about a movement which lies at the intersection of Sufism, the Islamic mystical tradition, and the millenarianism that often emerged in Muslim societies. The Mahdaviyya grew around the person of Sayyid Muḥammad Jawnpūrī, initially a shaykh of the

¹² Corbin, *History* 61.

¹³ On the Mahdaviyya, the Persian rendering (due to its Indian Persianate origin) of the Arabic Mahdawīyya, see Rizvi, *Muslim revivalist movements* 68–134.

quintessentially Indian Sufi order, the Chishtiyya,¹⁴ but who eventually made a claim to Mahdship and announced the end of times. The author of the *sīra*, Bandagī Miyān Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, the son of one of the Sayyid’s followers and successors, wrote it in order to resolve a problem, one also encountered by other millenarian movements, the fact that “fifty years after the death of the Mahdī, it began to become clear to the Mahdavis that the immediate end of the mundane world would be delayed.” Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān sought to resolve this problem by confirming the Sayyid’s claim to Mahdship and perpetuating the millenarian tradition embodied in his teachings by means of a biographical narrative. MacLean analyzes the *sīra*, a work cleverly constructed by Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān who used, among other things, the *ḥadīth* literature on the appearance of the Mahdī, and made his *sīra* of the founder mirror and parallel, in its details, the life of the Prophet himself.

Park’s essay presents readers with a relatively unexplored and researched, albeit fascinating, subject: Chinese Islam. The *EI*² article on al-Ṣīn includes valuable information about Chinese Muslims, their ethnology, and general history, but more than half of it consists of accounts of the Middle Kingdom by Muslim geographers. It includes a somewhat discouraging assessment that “[n]o contributions to Muslim culture or scholarship of any significance have ever come out of China.”¹⁵ We might explain this situation as a reflection of the negligible size of the Sino-Muslim community: at just twenty million, it is dwarfed by the overwhelming numbers of the Han Chinese. Still, any visitor to China, like this writer, can attest to the conspicuous presence of Islamic elements (especially restaurants!) in many places, including Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Xi’an, and others. Yet, the Chinese Muslims, despite their small numbers, were an integral part of Chinese life, as is evident in the case of the five Wu Ma warlords during the Warlord Era (1916–28). These Muslim figures controlled sections of the northeastern part of the country and engaged in politics, as equals with the rest of the strongmen who contested the sovereignty of the young Republic of China (1912–49).¹⁶ The name ‘Ma,’ shared by these warlords, is the first syllable of the Sinicized name of the Prophet Muḥammad and also that of Sino-Muslim intellectual Ma Zhu (1640–1711?), who lived at the beginning of the Qing dynasty (1644–1912) and to whom Park devotes his essay. A welcome addition to a growing body of works that deal with Chinese Islam,¹⁷ it examines the panegyric

14 On the Chishtiyya, see Trimingham, *The Sufi orders*, particularly 64–5, 177–8.

15 Bosworth et al., al-Ṣīn 617.

16 Lin, Wu Ma.

17 Although I am a budding and enthusiastic Sinophile and Sinophone, I am unable to assess the overall strength of the scholarship on Islam in China. However, I bring to the attention of readers the book *Islam* edited by J. Yijiu in the Religious Studies in Contemporary

Ma Zhu wrote on the life of the Prophet in his book on Islam entitled *Qingzhen zhinan*. Ma Zhu's biography of the Prophet is a typical representation of the effort Sino-Muslim scholars made to present the Prophet and their faith in terms intelligible to those of their fellow Han who were steeped into Confucianism. In doing so, however, Park shows how Ma Zhu transformed Muḥammad into a Confucian sage, and a superior one at that, by relying not only on Chinese classics but also on sources peculiar to the Chinese Muslim milieu.

The last section of this book, entitled **Perspectives**, offers two essays with fresh approaches to historiography. The late Donald P. Little, in the opening article of the maiden issue of *Mamlūk Studies Review* (1997), had underlined the importance of seeking historical information in a variety of documentary sources. He himself had the opportunity, as he narrates in the same article, to examine and catalogue legal documents preserved at al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf in Jerusalem.¹⁸ Meshal approaches the issue of documents, namely the *sijills* (judicial registers) of Ottoman Cairo from a new perspective. "The enormous data bank that is the Ottoman archive," she says, "creates a paper trail for the lives of the countless, faceless masses, and provides the foundations for a subaltern history rarely glimpsed in premodern historical sources." In order to assess the importance of this trove of data, she studies the way various factors, most notably the reform of Ottoman personal law at the technical and administrative levels of the judiciary process, influenced the type of information registered in the *sijills* and thus the kind of subject matter that we can mine from them.

To Risso, I gave the penultimate last words, in the guise of a conclusion. In an interesting twist of fate, her research ties together all the geographical regions represented in the essays of this volume: the world of the Arabs and the Turks, India, and China. Risso argues for a renewed perspective on the regions that radiate, in all cardinal directions, from the Indian Ocean, a perspective that takes into account the numerous ways these regions are connected to one another. Risso maintains that a process of history writing that relies too heavily on Eurocentric material diverted historical research from a consideration of the innumerable links that integrate West Asia into the realms of the Indian Ocean, especially on the economic plane, but also culturally and socially. She reflects on the significance of the terminology used to demarcate the regions of this world in terms of their human and physical geography. She concludes by surveying the myriad connections established by Indian merchants in Central Asia, Abyssinian slaves in the subcontinent, Omani Arab *émigrés* in Zanzibar,

China Collection published by Brill; this work contains English translations of research on Chinese Islam by Chinese scholars.

18 Little, Documents.

and Chinese merchant ships in the Malay Peninsula, and the historiographies they produced.

Perhaps the last words of this introduction should commemorate the memory of the scholar we honor in this *Festschrift*, Professor Donald P. Little. I hope the essays assembled here engage readers as they did me when I read them, pondered them, and assembled them in this volume. I also hope that readers keep in mind that there is something of Donald P. Little in every contribution. Whether it is a piece of advice told in his office, words at a conference, a comment in the margin of a dissertation, or a word of encouragement passed on in the corridor of the Islamic Studies Institute, all those involved in this project owe some part of their scholarship to his kind and helpful guidance.

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PART 1

Classical Historiography



Continuity and Change in Early Islamic Amman

Michael Wood

In the 630s, present-day Jordan passed from Byzantine rule to become an integral and valued part of the Islamic caliphate. We might reasonably assume that such a change in the political control of an area, coupled with the new religious orientation of at least some of its population, would provoke dramatic societal changes. In fact, since the nineteenth century, Western observers, travelers, archaeologists, diplomats, and historians, especially those writing in the Orientalist tradition, have used images of a devastating “conquest” of the Syrian region by “hordes” of Muslim or Arab “barbarians” (religious and ethnic labels are often used interchangeably). This “conquest” was presented as the beginning of a period of permanent economic and cultural decline.¹ In this study I draw on historical sources and archaeological evidence to determine whether the so-called Arab conquest initiated a period of decline for the city of Amman. I show that for the early Islamic period, there was in fact much more continuity than change and much of the change that we can observe actually started much earlier, before Islam even emerged. As a counter to this picture of a modest societal transition, I acknowledge that some degree of significant political change for Amman is indeed reflected in the historical and archaeological record.²

Early Islamic historians and geographers say relatively little about the cities that were located within present-day Jordan, considering that the area was at the center of the Umayyad empire that stretched across the Middle East and North Africa. A 1979 study concluded that there are few available medieval Islamic texts that we can use to reconstruct the history of Amman. This is not

1 Silberman, *Desolation and restoration* 76–87 and *Thundering hordes* 61–23, Avni, *The Byzantine-Islamic transition* 14–6. See also Said, *Orientalism*.

2 For the purposes of this paper “early Islamic Jordan” is defined as lasting until roughly the end of the Umayyad period. It has long been argued that the coming of the ‘Abbāsid dynasty caused the region to go into a decline (or accelerated an already existing one); cf. Walmsley, *Early Islamic Syria* 25–6. This might not have been the case, but this essay is primarily concerned with assessing whether the coming of Islam initiated such a process, and is less concerned with when it might have ended. However, I note developments after the fall of the Umayyads when they help clarify whether this is the case; for example, major church constructions took place in the later part of the second/eighth century.

unusual for a provincial city that was not an intellectual center where historical writing would have taken place.³ This is not simply a question of a scarcity of surviving sources, rather, I suggest that early Islamic sources ignored regions that did not contribute to a particular narrative involving the emergence of a functioning caliphate. The current analysis of the period has often “unconsciously followed an agenda enshrined in the works of the ninth and tenth centuries, especially al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923).”⁴ That agenda involves the construction of “an elaborate narrative describing the growth of the Islamic community, with particular emphasis on the question of political and religious authority.”⁵ The perspective was that of the center (the caliphate) and much attention was paid to conquest and civil war. The situation in the provinces was given considerably less attention, when it was noted at all.⁶ We should, of course, also remember that writers such as al-Ṭabarī and al-Balādhurī (d. c. 279/892) were not eyewitnesses to this period (they were both born after the caliphate had moved from Damascus to Baghdad).

Early Islamic Amman, however, is not entirely absent from the written record. Both al-Balādhurī and al-Ṭabarī note it, as do several medieval Arab geographers, in particular al-Muqaddasī (d. 390/1000), who as we see, offers a description of the town that in many ways corresponds directly with the archaeological record. While these geographers describe the situation two to three centuries or more after the area came under Islamic control, unless we assume that the region underwent a hitherto unidentified renaissance, we can conclude that conditions were similar to those in the Umayyad period.

It seems apparent that in examining how and if the region underwent change with the arrival of Islamic political control, we cannot sufficiently assess developments by using early Islamic historical and geographical sources alone.⁷ Such sources do not provide the detail necessary to enable a comprehensive understanding of what happened when Byzantine control of the region collapsed. Regarding Amman, the lack of historical references stands in contrast to the significant archaeological evidence available; this exists in the form of above ground remains (that is, archaeological evidence that does not

3 Cited by Northedge, *Studies on Roman* 47.

4 Donner, Review 183.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid. 183–4.

7 Northedge demonstrates that one cannot assess an area's importance based on how often it is mentioned in surviving primary sources by noting that there is as much written material on Ayyūbid and Mamlūk Amman, when the city was clearly in decline, as there was for the city during Umayyad times when, according to the archaeological evidence, it was an important city; Northedge, *Studies on Roman* 47.

require excavation) as well as the results of recent excavations and surveys.⁸ For a more detailed picture, one that might offer nuance to the written accounts, it is necessary to turn to archaeological research. Donald Whitcomb notes:

In a volume such as this on the archaeology of Jordan, it would not have been surprising in years past to find the articles ending with the “coming of Islam.” The dominant model was that this momentous event sealed the past and began a new historical mediaeval period. This somehow implied that full historical documentation (would that such a thing existed) somehow obviated the need for archaeology, for scholars studying the period after the defining event, archaeological methodology was seen as subsidiary to historical, a scholarly tendency commonly encountered in the study of any society that has left written sources. Although written records may provide details, thoughts, reasoning and the like, broader trends, both temporal and spatial, frequently may be clarified only through the archaeological record.⁹

Though studies of the Islamic monuments of Jordan began as early as the beginning of the twentieth century and some excavations were carried out in the years prior to World War II, large-scale archaeological research is a relatively recent phenomenon. The Amman citadel was first photographed and mapped by Rudolf Brünnow and Alfred von Domaszewski during their 1897–8 travels through Syria and Jordan. Jerash was excavated by J. Crowfoot, C.S. Fisher, C.C. McCown, and Carl Kraeling. Unfortunately, they largely ignored any early Islamic material or misidentified it as Byzantine. In 1949, the Jordanian Department of Antiquities began excavations of the levels of the Amman citadel from the Islamic period. Work at Pella, beginning in 1967, allowed archaeologists to distinguish, for the first time, between Byzantine and early Islamic pottery, while the Hesban excavations of the 1970s were instrumental in James Sauer's development of a firm pottery typology. Excavations and surveys directed at the early Islamic period have expanded greatly since the 1980s throughout greater Syria, particularly in Jordan. These included extensive excavations at Jerash and Pella, of the so-called ‘desert castles’ and of Amman

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Whitcomb, Umayyad and Abbasid periods 503. On the importance of ‘arguments of stone’ (archaeological data) to supplement and clarify written sources (such as al-Muqaddasi) for the early Islamic period and to illuminate areas of the past that are not recorded in these sources, see Avni, *The Byzantine-Islamic transition* 1–10.

itself. Although such regional cities as Pella and Jerash have been the subject of extensive archaeological research over the course of many decades, the unique correlation between al-Muqaddasī and such features as the Umayyad citadel is of particular note. Amman is also depicted in the mosaic floors of Umm al-Raṣāṣ. These mosaics provide a glimpse of what the city might have looked like as late as the mid second/eighth century.¹⁰

The immediate impact of invading Arab armies on cities such as Amman might have been minimal. Early Islamic writers, such as al-Ṭabarī and al-Balādhurī, say little about the destruction of cities. Instead, they emphasize successful military campaigns, the peaceful capitulation of towns and villages, and the terms under which such surrenders took place. Thus, al-Balādhurī describes the capture of the urban centers of Jordan:

At the arrival of Khâlid, the Moslems gathered their forces against Busra, and it capitulated. They then dispersed throughout all Ḥaurân which they subdued. The chief of Adhrīʿât came to them offering to capitulate on the same terms on which the people of Busra had capitulated and agreeing to make all the land of al-Bathnîyah a *kharâj* land. The request was granted, and Yazîd ibn-abi-Sufyân entered the city and made a covenant with its people. Thus the two districts of Ḥaurân and al-Bathnîyah came under the full control of the Moslems. Thence they came to Palestine and the Jordan, invading what had not been reduced. Yazîd marched against ʿĀmmân and made an easy conquest of it, making terms of capitulation similar to those of Busra. Besides, he effected the complete conquest of the province of al-Balkâʾ. When abu-ʿUbaidah came to power, all that was already conquered. At the conquest of Damascus, abu-ʿUbaidah was the commander-in-chief; but the terms of capitulation were made by Khâlid, abu-ʿUbaidah concurring.¹¹

Although he does not mention Amman specifically, al-Ṭabarī stresses that on many occasions, orders were given to refrain from the persecution of the region's inhabitants or the destruction of the property of Christians:

10 Schick, *Archaeological sources* 80–3; Walmsley, *Early Islamic Syria* 29. See Brünnow, *Die Provincia Arabia*; Kraeling, *Gerasa*; Harding, *Excavations on the citadel*; Smith, *Pella*; Sauer, *The pottery of Jordan*; McNicoll, Smith, and Hennessey, *Pella*; McNicoll et al., *Pella*; Smith and Day, *Pella*; Walmsley, *Pella/Fihl*; Northedge, *Studies on Roman*; Piccirillo, *The Umayyad churches*.

11 Al-Balādhurī, *The origins* 193.

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. This is what the servant of God, 'Umar, the Commander of the Faithful, awarded to the people of Lydda and to all the people of Palestine who are in the same category. He gave them an assurance of safety for themselves, for their property, their churches, their crosses, their sick and their healthy, and all their rites. Their churches will not be inhabited [by the Muslims] and will not be destroyed. Neither their churches, nor the land where they stand, nor their rituals, nor their crosses, nor their property will be damaged. They will not be forcibly converted, and none of them will be harmed. The people of Lydda and those of the people of Palestine who are in the same category must pay the poll tax like the people of the Syrian cities. The same conditions, in their entirety, apply to them if they leave [Lydda].¹²

Note that these terms of capitulation formed the basis for later systems of taxation, as there was much to gain from modifying the record as to whether a city had surrendered or had been taken by force.¹³ Even if such accounts are in fact genuine, there seems to be some evidence that generous terms were subsequently ignored.¹⁴ Al-Balādhurī notes that Amman was an “easy conquest” and that it had surrendered on terms similar to Buṣrā.¹⁵ If so, the property of the people of Amman should have been left untouched. In fact, there seems to be little archaeological evidence of the destruction of towns. Historians like al-Ṭabarī and al-Balādhurī note that Caesarea did not capitulate and was, in fact, taken by force with a great loss of life after a long siege. Layers of debris were once attributed to this attack. However, although its inhabitants were defeated by force, it seems that this interpretation of the archaeological data is erroneous and the coastal city itself was not damaged.¹⁶ In fact, al-Muqaddasī, writing in the fourth/tenth century, describes it as the most beautiful city on the “Greek Sea” (the Mediterranean), with well populated suburbs protected

12 Al-Ṭabarī, *The history* xii, 192.

13 Schick, *Archaeological sources* 75.

14 Northedge notes that by the second half of the second/eighth century a Byzantine quarter of Amman had been built over by a new citadel. This may indicate that property was seized from the local inhabitants (or at the very least that they were forced to sell the land); Northedge, *Studies on Roman* 48.

15 Al-Balādhurī, *The origins* 193.

16 Al-Ṭabarī, *The history* xii, 183–4; al-Balādhurī, *The origins* 216–9. For the archaeology see Toombs, *The stratigraphy* 223–232 and Holm, *Archaeological evidence* 73–85, both cited by Walmsley, *Early Islamic Syria* 23.

by an “impregnable fortress.” It was noted for its beautiful main mosque and its production of high-quality bread and milk.¹⁷

For the period after the conquest itself, the picture is more complicated. Al-Ṭabarī describes the many civil wars that racked the early Islamic polity, but in his archaeological and historical survey of post-conquest Palestine, Schick points out that the battles generally took place elsewhere.¹⁸ Alastair Northedge, one of Amman’s principal excavators, believes that Amman was a substantial center during Umayyad times, “a city of second rank within Bilād al-Shām.”¹⁹ It declined in status, and was a mere village by Ayyūbid times; it disappeared entirely in the late eighth/fourteenth and early ninth/fifteenth centuries, under the Mamlūks. It only emerged as a modern city in 1878–82, when it was settled by Circassians, then it became the modern capital of Jordan.²⁰ Al-Muqaddasī describes Amman as lying on the border of the desert and being surrounded by many villages and fields. It is the capital of the Balqā’ district, said to be a place “rich in grain and flocks; it also has many streams which work the mills” where “living is cheap and fruit plentiful,” although its access roads are bad and its inhabitants illiterate.²¹ In a discussion of the weights and measures used in fourth-/tenth-century Syria, he mentions specific units used by the inhabitants of Amman to weigh olives and dried figs; this would suggest that these products must have been cultivated there.²² He also lists grain, lamb, and honey as being produced at Amman.²³

Al-Muqaddasī offers a short description of the city, in which he identifies several important landmarks. He notes that Amman has a fine mosque resembling that of Mecca, near the marketplace, with a courtyard decorated with mosaics. He also notes Qaṣr Jālūt (Goliath’s castle) on the hill overlooking

17 Al-Muqaddasī, *Description of Syria* 55.

18 “Throughout the early Islamic period, then the population of Palestine as a whole seems to have experienced security and prosperity, and so far as the available sources allows us to judge such matters, the Christian communities benefited from this as much as others did. There were a number of civil wars and rebellions in the period, but most of these destructive events took place elsewhere, and so for the most part did not affect the population of Palestine directly, at least until the Abbasid period”; Schick, *The Christian communities* 110–1.

19 Northedge, *Studies on Roman* 47.

20 Ibid. Note that there is some archaeological evidence that Amman remained of some importance into Ayyūbid times; a tower forming part of the fortifications of the Amman citadel was constructed in the late sixth/twelfth to early seventh/thirteenth centuries. Bikai and Egan, *Archaeology in Jordan* 493–6.

21 Al-Muqaddasī, *Description of Syria* 56.

22 Ibid. 73.

23 Ibid. 70.

the city. This fortress contained the tomb of the biblical character Uriah, over which a mosque was built.²⁴ The Amman citadel was topped by the ruins of a huge Umayyad palace and was protected by impressive Umayyad fortifications that consisted of the reused Roman walls that had fallen into ruin by the end of the Byzantine period, and by new construction. The Umayyad citadel was protected by a wall with ten towers and four gates; these can be dated to sometime between 724 and 744.²⁵ The fortifications were damaged in the earthquake of 749 and were subsequently restored by the 'Abbāsids.²⁶ The palace complex has been only partially excavated, but Spanish researchers have drawn up a theoretical plan showing that the palace had at least 150 rooms, 14 courtyards, a large cistern, and a monumental pillared walkway.²⁷ It is notable that al-Muqaddasī assigns biblical names to the features of Amman (Solomon, Goliath, and Uriah). This might indicate that for him Qaṣr Jālūt was an ancient fortress rather than one built in the more recent past and that knowledge of the urban landscape of Umayyad Jordan had declined.²⁸ Elsewhere he identifies the classical ruins of Baalbek and Tadmur (Palmyra) as "cities of Solomon" and includes them among the wonders of Syria, along with the Dome of the Rock, the mosque of Damascus and the harbors of Tyre and Acre.²⁹

A lower terrace was also found at the site of the citadel; this consisted of a domestic complex that was in use in the late Byzantine and early Islamic periods. This structure had a central hall, flanked by several adjoining rooms, which were decorated with mosaics. The presence of a semi-circular apse may indicate that it was originally used as a chapel. One of the adjoining rooms had a great deal of pottery, bones, cooking pots, and storage facilities, indicating that it may have functioned as a kitchen.³⁰ If this were the case, it might have been used for a standing force stationed at the site because Amman was apparently garrisoned.³¹ This lower terrace, along with the palace, may have been

24 Qaṣr Jālūt has been identified, possibly, as the classical temple of Hercules, indicating the continued existence of classical remains next to later Islamic structures; Zayadine, *Recent excavations* 22. However, Northedge believes, based on the archaeological evidence, that the temple would not have been visible to al-Muqaddasī in the fourth/tenth century and that it was more likely that al-Muqaddasī was referring to an abandoned Umayyad palace.

25 Northedge, *Studies on Roman* 123.

26 Ibid. 106, 124.

27 Alamagro, *Origins and repercussions* 189.

28 Northedge, *Studies on Roman* 60.

29 Al-Muqaddasī, *Description of Syria* 85.

30 De Vries, *Archaeology in Jordan* 526–7.

31 Al-Ṭabarī notes the dispatch of an armed unit to Humayma, in the south of Jordan, to arrest members of the 'Abbāsīd family who were plotting the ultimately successful overthrow of the Umayyads; *The history* xxvii, 84.

part of a "Much larger urban conglomerate with distinct functional zones, consisting of streets, a market plaza, a mosque, houses, a bathhouse and water systems servicing a self-contained, compact town imposingly set above the late antique and early Islamic centre below."³²

These archaeological discoveries appear in line with al-Muqaddasī's description cited above, in which he talks of a mosque at the Amman citadel and another one near the marketplace. This mosque, which is compared favorably to the one in Mecca and is described as being decorated with fine mosaics, may be a structure that survived in the center of Amman until the early twentieth century (the last traces of this building disappeared in the 1920s).³³ In fact, ruins from Roman and early Islamic times survived in central Amman and the surrounding hills up to recent times. A monumental Roman building, known as the Nymphaeum, has been excavated there. It served as a public fountain and shrine to water nymphs and included a complex of water channels, columns, arches, and gates. Archaeological evidence indicates that it was in continual use, albeit for a diversity of purposes, into the Byzantine, Umayyad, and 'Abbāsid periods. Much of the material on this and other sites in Amman has been lost with the growth of the modern city, but accounts and photographs from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have survived.³⁴

Northedge sees Islamic Amman as a direct successor of the earlier classical city which, with the exception of new Christian monuments, had changed little from the second century CE. It would appear that the Umayyad congregational mosque and the Umayyad palace were simply added to the existing Byzantine city which, like Umayyad Amman, included both the citadel and the valleys below.³⁵ Although the Umayyad palace may no longer have been in use by the fourth/tenth century, the presence of a market and a congregational mosque seems to indicate that a substantial population engaged in agriculture and commerce. Al-Muqaddasī describes Amman as "a harbour of the desert and a place of refuge for the Bedouin Arabs."³⁶ Thus, the town might have functioned as a regional trade center. Abū l-Fidā', writing in 720/1321, offers a more modest description. Although the town is surrounded by many fertile fields, Abū l-Fidā' describes it as "a very ancient town, and was ruined before the days of Islam."³⁷ It is possible that he may have been referring to the ruins

32 Walmsley, *Early Islamic Syria* 88; see Alamagro and Arce, *The Umayyad town* 659–65.

33 Al-Muqaddasī, *Description of Syria* 56; Northedge, *Studies on Roman* 159.

34 Bikai and Kooring, *Archaeology in Jordan* 527–8.

35 Northedge, *Studies on Roman* 60.

36 Al-Muqaddasī, *Description of Syria* 56.

37 Le Strange, *Palestine* 393.

that al-Muqaddasī mentioned as still visible in the city, rather than the status or wealth of the town.

Recent excavations of a multi-storied stone house (named Building 600) at Tall Jāwā, 11 kilometers south of Amman, indicate that the latter's hinterland remained prosperous from Byzantine into early Islamic times. Building 600 consists of a set of rooms grouped around a central courtyard.³⁸ Its size, along with the presence of plaster decorations and mosaic floors, indicates that it probably belonged to a relatively wealthy family, although it was by no means a palace. The style of this building, as well as various artifacts, allow its original construction to be dated to the last years of the Byzantine period.³⁹ The stratigraphy of the site and the artifacts, such as painted pottery and lamps, indicate that the building was occupied during the first-/seventh- to second-/eighth-century transition period to Islamic rule. Finds include artifacts inscribed with Greek letters, Byzantine-styled pottery, and a bronze cross as well as three crosses carved into a lintel of one building and a single cross in relief in a circular window. Items associated with Islam include a Kufic-lettered ostrica (a pottery shard with writing on it), a door lintel, several lamps with Arabic writing, and a hoard of copper coins.⁴⁰ This mix of Christian and Islamic components in the archaeological record led the site's excavator, P.M. Michelle Daviau, to suggest that this was a continually occupied area. The Ghassānids, a Christian Arab tribe, worked as clients of the Byzantines during the sixth century CE, with responsibility for guarding the eastern frontiers. They settled at such sites as Umm al-Raṣāṣ and Umm al-Jimāl and while Tall Jāwā was not a Ghassānid fortress, its location near the heights of al-Yādūda made it a good location for the settlement of Ghassānid families. The exploitation of the region for agricultural purposes is indicated by the presence of rock cut installations to the south of the site. The artifacts recovered from Building 600 may provide evidence that Amman's hinterland was populated by Christian Arabs, who gradually converted to Islam; lamps decorated with Christian motifs were replaced with lamps decorated with Islamic terminology.⁴¹

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38 Daviau, *Excavations at Tall Jawa* 3, 26.

39 Ibid. 468–9.

40 Ibid. 471–2.

41 Lamps were found that showed human figures enveloped in vines and the name of a known Christian lamp-maker from Jerash. Daviau, *Excavations at Tall Jawa* 475–6.

The Umayyad dynasty, which ruled most of the Middle East, North Africa, and Spain from 40/661 to 132/750, had their primary residence in Damascus and for one of the only times in history, Amman was near the center of political power. Al-Balādhurī describes it as the chief city of the Balqā' district, and notes that its fall allowed for the control of the region.⁴² Coins from the reign of 'Abd al-Malik bear the name of Amman, indicating that the city was important enough to possess a regional mint (as did other smaller centers, such as Baalbek and Buṣrā).⁴³ Architectural remains confirm its importance at least as a regional center. The Umayyad palace's pillared walkway, along with the sheer size of the palace, is among several features that symbolize the power and authority of its inhabitants. Rooms laid out in a cruciform pattern and topped with domes are evidence of the influence of the Sassanid and Byzantine courts. The influence of the Byzantines is particularly evident in the palace's domed vestibule.⁴⁴ Court protocol may have been evident in the design of this domed vestibule, as well as in the domed "throne room," which was approached from the main gate, after crossing courtyards and moving down a monumental pillared walkway. The dome, as a symbol, represented the universal nature of imperial power. Its presence, at the entrance to the complex, may reflect the common practice of dispensing justice at the gate.⁴⁵ In Amman, these symbolic features likely designated the presence of the sovereign's representatives and the reach of his authority rather than the actual presence of the caliph, although it might have served as a summer palace.

Several incidents mentioned by al-Ṭabarī underline the importance of Amman as a political center. In 125–6/743–4, al-Walid II (d. 126/744) had his cousin and political opponent, Sulaymān b. Hishām, scourged, shaved, and imprisoned in Amman.⁴⁶ Evidently, it was considered a secure place to intern high-value enemies of the ruling caliph. Later, after al-Walid's murder, Sulaymān emerged from prison, seized what revenues were available in Amman and left for Damascus.⁴⁷ Amman was one of just six Umayyad-era cities known to possess a congregational mosque (supposedly large enough to accommodate all believers for Friday prayers). It is possible that members of the Umayyad aristocracy living in the nearby desert came into the city on a regular basis to use

42 Al-Balādhurī, *The origins* 193.

43 Bates, *The coinage* 215.

44 Written accounts note that the imperial palace in Constantinople was entered through a similar domed gateway; Alamagro, *Origins and repercussions* 181.

45 Ibid. 183.

46 Al-Ṭabarī, *The history* xxvi, 127.

47 Ibid. xxvi, 183.

the mosque.⁴⁸ The Amman mosque and the Amman citadel may have been part of a complex relationship involving the urban population of Amman, the local Bedouin tribes, and the Umayyad caliphs who spent part of the year in palatial estates in the desert. As late as the fourth/tenth century, al-Muqaddasī noted the close relationship between the city and the surrounding desert areas.⁴⁹ Al-Ṭabarī describes the crown prince al-Walid b. Yazid (later Walid II) receiving and feeding pilgrims returning from Mecca, at Ziza, a large village in al-Balqā', which acted as a staging post on the pilgrimage route. He also fed the pilgrims' riding animals and even provided pilgrims with gifts, grants, and assistance. This assistance, distributed on a monthly basis, was recorded by his scribes.⁵⁰

The so-called "desert castles," Umayyad-era estates located mostly to its east of Amman, may have played a complicated economic and political function in early Islamic society. Qaṣr 'Amra, some 85 kilometers from Amman, has elaborate baths and is decorated with depictions of scantily clad women and scenes of hunting and wine consumption. The same frescoes also show known world rulers, including the Byzantine emperor, the Visigoth king Roderick, Khusraw of Persia, and the Negus of Ethiopia, offering tribute to the Umayyad caliph; the paintings perhaps functioned as propaganda tools aimed at impressing visiting dignitaries.⁵¹ The site might give some credence to a theory that these "desert castles" were the pleasure palaces and hunting lodges of the Damascus elite, including the caliph, who sought clean air and a return to their former Bedouin lifestyles.⁵² Al-Ṭabarī describes how Hishām b. 'Abd al-Malik moved with his sons to al-Ruṣāfa, a Byzantine city in the desert of northeast Syria, in order to escape the plague. When told by his advisers: "Do not leave! Caliphs are not touched by plague. It is unheard of for a caliph to catch the plague," he replied: "Do you want to experiment with me?"⁵³ The desert estates became a refuge from more than just the disease and heat of urban life; during the final years of the Umayyad caliphate, the desert east of Amman became a place of exile and conspiracies. Al-Walid b. Yazid, criticized by Hishām for his irreligious behavior and his drinking, realized that he had been judged unsuitable to assume the caliphate. Consequently, he left the court at al-Ruṣāfa

48 Northedge, *Studies on Roman* 68–9.

49 Al-Muqaddasī, *Description of Syria* 56.

50 Al-Ṭabarī, *The history* xxvi, 103.

51 Creswell, *A short account* 105–12; Fowden, *Qasayr Amra*. See also Keller, *Archaeology in Jordan* 708–11 and Corbett, *Archaeology in Jordan* 633–6.

52 Grabar, *Early Islamic settlements* 67, Northedge, *Studies on Roman* 50.

53 Al-Ṭabarī, *The history* xxvi, 81. This move did not, ultimately, protect him from disease; he later died of diphtheria at al-Ruṣāfa in 743; *ibid.* xxvi, 71–2.

and resided near al-Azraq at a “watering place called al-Aghdaf.”⁵⁴ Note that al-Walīd was apparently a hunting enthusiast; one of his crimes in the eyes of Hishām was trying to hide dogs, in boxes, so that he could take them with him on a pilgrimage to Mecca.⁵⁵ Presumably, he found the lifestyle at al-Azraq, with its abundant hunting, more to his liking. In the desert, if the frescoes from Qaṣr ‘Amra are an indicator, while there he also felt free to indulge his other great passion, wine.

Others conducted more serious business in the desert east of Amman; in 125–6/743–4 Yazīd III (d. 126/744) conferred with his brother ‘Abbās while they were both residing in the region, on whether to rebel against al-Walīd II, who had succeeded Hishām.⁵⁶ Later Yūsuf b. ‘Umar al-Thaqafī, governor of Iraq, was removed from the post by Yazīd III. Fearing for his safety, he fled to a place of refuge in the Balqā’ district, only to be captured by Yazīd’s men, imprisoned and executed; the fugitive governor apparently had a house and agricultural land in the region.⁵⁷ Al-Ṭabarī offers several versions of this incident. In one account, he mentions that al-Thaqafī was captured by fifty men from the *jund* of al-Balqā’ (perhaps this was the paid army that kept the garrison secure, and was stationed in the region’s capital Amman).⁵⁸ As noted, a garrison was similarly dispatched to arrest members of the ‘Abbāsīd family a few years later, in the final days of the Umayyad rule. Evidently the deserts of Jordan had political dimensions for others, besides the Umayyads, although the region lost much of its importance with the dynasty’s fall. The ‘Abbāsīds maintained an estate at Humayma, south of the Dead Sea and it was in this relatively modest group of buildings, which included a residence and a mosque, that at least some anti-Umayyad conspiracies were hatched.⁵⁹

Amman is depicted in the floor mosaics of Umm al-Raṣāṣ (ancient Mefaa or Kastron Mefaa), a site some 30 kilometers southeast of the former city; these allow for a visual view of what the city might have looked like as late as the mid second/eighth century. The Church of Saint Stephen, dated to either 99/718 or 138/756, is decorated with a lavish mosaic floor. The edges of this floor depict a series of contemporary towns on both sides of the Jordan River, including Jerusalem, Neapolis (Nablus), Sebastis (Sebastia), Caesarea, Diopolis (Lydda),

54 Ibid. xxvi, 91. Al-Ṭabarī refers to one of these settlements, al-Aghdaf, near al-Azraq, as being within the “Amman area,” although that it is, in fact, a considerable distance from the city; *ibid.* xxvi 148.

55 Ibid. xxvi, 88–9, 92–3.

56 Ibid. xxvi, 137.

57 Ibid. xxvi, 200–3.

58 Ibid. xxvi, 203.

59 Foote, *From residence* 457–66.

Eleutheropolis (Bayt Gibrīn), Ashkelon, Gaza, Kastron Mefaa, Philadelphia (Amman), Madaba, Areopolis (Rabba), and Charachmoba (Karak).⁶⁰ These mosaics offer two valuable insights into the post-Byzantine period for Amman. First, their late date is an indicator of the wealth and stability of the local Christian community a century or more after the region passed to Islamic political control. Second, the cities are shown not as classical cities of the popular imagination, but as walled and gated towns dominated by churches. As noted, the Amman citadel had ten towers and four gates. These towns had quite a different character than the autonomous city-states founded across the Middle East during Hellenistic and Roman times. This is very much in line with the model of Hugh Kennedy, who proposed that changes in the urban character of Syria began before the Arab conquest and that the late Byzantine period, particularly after the mid-sixth century CE, was one of urban decline, during which the number and size of sites decreased throughout Syria. The classical city, with its many civic amenities, its colonnaded streets and its open public spaces, largely vanished and were replaced by towns with poor-quality structures and narrow, winding streets that anticipate the medieval civic pattern. Before the years 540–50 CE, Byzantine Syria was both prosperous and stable, but after that decade it entered into a period of increasing decline; by the year 600 it had acquired the urban geography it had for much of the early Middle Ages. Patterns of prosperity changed; rich coastal cities such as Antioch and Beirut fared worst, while cities on the edge of the desert, such as Damascus and Aleppo, seem to have entered into a period of relative prosperity. The steppe lands increasingly fell under the control of nomads. Kennedy describes the rise of the Arab Ghassānids, Arab clients of the Byzantines, as more than a change in defense policy; their rise marked a significant stage in a long-term process of demographic and social change in Syria and Arabia. Kennedy attributes these changes to a variety of factors, including Persian invasions (in both the sixth and seventh centuries CE), plagues, earthquakes, and the decline of trade with the Mediterranean region. None of these factors were decisive, but together they changed the demographic landscape of Syria; urban centers came to resemble large agricultural villages rather than the classical *polis*.⁶¹ Gideon Avni, in his reassessment of the archaeological evidence from late Byzantine and early Islamic Palestine, describes this period as not really involving a decline at all. Although large-scale Roman style public monuments were no longer being

60 Piccirillo, The mosaics 227 and The Umayyad churches 333–41. Schick, *The Christian communities* 472–3.

61 Kennedy, The last century 150, 180–1. See also Kennedy, From polis to Medina 3–27 and Kennedy, Islam 229–33.

built, this did not necessarily imply a decrease in the population or prosperity of the region. Such a collapse only occurred in the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries. He notes that scholars have traditionally seen the “the monumental Roman city as the epitome of human achievement, as opposed to the perception of the Middle Eastern ‘Muslim city’ and the medieval cities of Europe as built on the ashes of Hellenistic and Roman culture.”⁶² In fact, the change in monumental architecture was not the product of a society in economic and administrative decline. The new style cities, with small houses and enclosed private spaces, remained quite prosperous. Avni mentions Amman, with its monumental structures, as an exception to this trend.⁶³ The coming of Islam might not have initiated a period of rapid decline, but instead represented merely the latest step in a long-term transition for the cities of the region, such as Amman. But, while change in the countryside and in the towns was relatively modest, the new political regime did signal a marked change in the status of the region and its relationship to imperial power. In one respect, the early Islamic sources and the archaeological evidence seem to be in agreement, namely, with regard to the rise of the Umayyad caliphate, Amman took on an unaccustomed role as a center of political power and influence.

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62 Avni, *The Byzantine-Islamic transition* 347.

63 Ibid. 347.

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Mashriqī Historians on the Muwaḥḥid Persecution of the Jews and Christians: New Sources for an Old Debate

Heather J. Empey

Many¹ Ayyūbid and Mamlūk-era historians maintain that, when he came to power, the first Muwaḥḥid² caliph, ‘Abd al-Mu’min b. ‘Alī I-Kūmī (487–558/1094–1163)³ took a measure that few Muslim sovereigns had: he abolished the *dhimma* pact,⁴ and instead gave the Jews and Christians of the Muslim West the choice between conversion, exile or death. Indeed, the Zangid court historian, Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233); the Syrian chronicler and preacher, Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī (d. 654/1256); the Mamlūk bureaucrat, al-Nuwayrī (677–733/1279–1333); the Baḥrī-era traditionist, al-Dhahabī (673–748/1274–1348); and the Burjī annalist, Ibn Taghrī Birdī (d. 874/1469–70)⁵ repeatedly affirm that Jews, Christians, synagogues, and churches could not be found in the Maghrib after the rise of the Muwaḥḥidūn.

By contrast, the works of Muwaḥḥid and post-Muwaḥḥid historians of the Maghrib⁶ are virtually silent on the alleged persecution of the *ahl al-dhimma*.

- 1 I am grateful to Sami Massoud for inviting me to contribute to this volume, as well as for his encouragement, patience, and valuable suggestions. I would also like to thank my friend, Abdul Muthalib, for patiently going over several of my translations and transliterations with me.
- 2 Lit., “those who proclaim God’s oneness” or “unitarians”; the Anglicized form is Almohads. The Murābiṭūn (lit., “those bound in fighting,” active c. 437–541/1046–1147) is Anglicized to Almoravids; they preceded the Muwaḥḥidūn.
- 3 The best scholarly history of the Muwaḥḥidūn remains Huici Miranda, *Historia política*.
- 4 Islamic law traditionally accorded a special status to members of other monotheistic faiths, whereby they could reside in a land under Muslim rule (*dār al-Islām*) without forfeiting their religion, customs, or property, but they paid a poll tax (*jizya*); see Cahen, *Dhimma*. For the Maghribī context, see Hopkins, *Medieval* 59–70.
- 5 For biographies of the aforementioned historians, see Rosenthal, Ibn al-Athīr; Cahen, Ibn al-Djawzī; Chapoutot-Remadi, al-Nuwayrī; Ben Cheneb and Somogvi, al-Dhahabī; and Popper, Abu ‘l-Maḥāsin Djamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf b. Taghrībirdī.
- 6 These include ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s companion, al-Baydhaq (d. after 558/1163), the Muwaḥḥid secretary Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Ṣalāt (d. after 600/1203), the late Muwaḥḥid-era chroniclers, Ibn al-Qaṭṭān (d. after 665/1266) and Ibn ‘Idhārī (d. after 712/1313), the anonymous Marinid-era historical work, *al-Ḥulal al-mawshīyya* (composed c. 783/1381–2) and the Marinid-era

We find only one or two cryptic references to the conversion of Jews to Islam and hardly a word is said about Maghribī Christians, although foreign Christians do appear from time to time as merchants, mercenaries, and missionaries.⁷ Significantly, Maghribī historians and jurists also make no mention of any official anti-*dhimmī* decree by ‘Abd al-Mu’min or subsequent Muwaḥḥid caliphs.⁸

This difference between Maghribī and Mashriqī historians, and the anachronisms and biases that crop up in some of their reports (*akhbār*, sing. *khabar*),⁹ has divided scholars on the issue of what really happened to Maghribī Jews and Christians under Muwaḥḥid rule.¹⁰ Early Orientalist scholarship, basing itself on the reports of medieval Jewish historians and poets and a few Arabic chronicles, took for granted that the Jewish and Christian communities in the Muwaḥḥid Maghrib were totally destroyed.¹¹ In a seminal analysis (published in 1967) of Jewish and Arabic sources on the question,¹² David Corcos (d. 1975) contested the entrenched view that the Muwaḥḥidūn had officially revoked the *dhimma* pact.¹³ He argued instead that the deterioration of the situation of the Jews was “local and temporary”¹⁴ and that Christians were even favored by the Muwaḥḥidūn.¹⁵ Corcos underlined the lack of consensus among medieval Jewish and Christian historians and was equally unconvinced by what he found in Arabic sources, particularly those from the Muslim East.¹⁶ His dismissal of ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s persecution of *dhimmīs* as “the fruit of the imagination of a few Arab authors”¹⁷ has since been taken up by several contemporary

historian of Fez, Ibn Abī Zar‘ (d. 726/1340–1). For a recent overview of Muwaḥḥid historiography, see Gaspariño García, *Las fuentes* 25–49; see also Fricaud, *Les ṭalaba* 333–42.

7 On the debate over the continued presence of Christians in Muwaḥḥid lands, see Abulafia, *Christian merchants* 251–7; Lapiedra Gutiérrez, *Christian participation* 235–50; and Molénat, *Sur le rôle* 389–413.

8 The lack of an official decree has been emphasized by Corcos, *The nature* 279–85; Bennison, *Almohad tawḥīd* 196–7 and Cherif, *Encore* 72–7.

9 On *khavar* as the fundamental building block of Muslim historiography, see Robinson, *Islamic historiography* 15–7, 92–3, and 126–7.

10 Recent contributions to the debate include Bennison and Gallego, *Jewish trading* 33–51; Bennison and Gallego, *Religious minorities* 143–52; Bennison, *Almohad tawḥīd* 195–216, Fierro, *Conversion* 155–73; and Cherif, *Encore* 65–87, who argues, not without justification, that the topic has been subject to “excessive interpretations.”

11 See, for example, Munk, *Notice* 5–70; and Hirschberg, *A history* i, 117–39.

12 Corcos, *The nature* 259–85. For the original Hebrew version of the article, see Corcos, *The attitude* 137–60.

13 This view is evident in Hirschberg, *A history* i, 117–39.

14 Corcos, *The nature* 284.

15 Corcos, *The Jews* 284.

16 Corcos, *The nature* 263.

17 *Ibid.* 279.

scholars, who have used the unreliability of the source material to challenge the assumption that there was a defined and long-lasting Muwaḥḥid persecution of religious minorities.¹⁸

In the current study, I intervene in this debate by bringing to the fore some key—but heretofore neglected—Mashriqī reports on ‘Abd al-Mu‘min’s persecution of Jews and Christians. The first of these can be found in Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī’s *Mir’āt al-zamān fī tārikh al-a’yān*.¹⁹ Sibṭ elaborates a flattering portrait of ‘Abd al-Mu‘min, a portrait that is interesting in its own right, because it stands out from the mostly disapproving Mashriqī portrayal of the Muwaḥḥid caliph. His account is also an important missing link between earlier Mashriqī texts and the reports in al-Dhahabī’s *Tārikh al-Islām wa-wafayāt al-mashāhūr wa-l-a‘lām*. Al-Dhahabī is central to the debate on the fate of Muwaḥḥid-era *dhimmīs*, and has been since Solomon Munk (d. 1867) first uncovered (in 1842) a lengthy report dealing with their persecution in a manuscript version of the *Tārikh al-Islām*.²⁰ Since then, al-Dhahabī has been blamed for the inaccuracies and literary flourishes in this key report, although it continues to be cited, both to prove and disprove the abolishment of the *dhimma* by the Muwaḥḥidūn.²¹ Scholarship after Corcos has nevertheless failed to explore additional evidence from the modern edited Arabic editions of the *Tārikh al-Islām* and *Sīyar a‘lām al-nubalā’*;²² these texts demonstrate that al-Dhahabī’s work on the issue was much more nuanced than previously thought. By better incorporating Sibṭ and al-Dhahabī into the historiographic fold, we can correct some current misunderstandings about the sources of and borrowings between Mashriqī historians, in the hopes of redeeming them as authoritative sources on the Muwaḥḥid persecution of Jews and Christians.

18 See, in particular, Bennison, Almohad *tawḥīd*; Cherif, *Encore*; and Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*.

19 See Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī, *Mir’āt*. I would like to thank my friend, Eliza Tasbihi, for helping me to acquire a much-needed copy of the Hyderabad 1951–2 edition of the *Mir’āt*, which is a reproduction of Jewett’s facsimile edition of Yale MSS Landberg no. 136: Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī, *Mir’āt az-zamān*. The publication of a full critical addition of the *Mir’āt* is long overdue; see Cahen, *Review* 191–4.

20 Munk, *Notice* 39–45. Indeed, Molénat has said that the question of whether or not ‘Abd al-Mu‘min persecuted the Jews and Christians rests primarily on al-Dhahabī’s shoulders; see Molénat, *Sur le rôle* 396.

21 Those who see the report as valid include Molénat, *Sur le rôle* 396–9; and Fierro, *Conversion* 158–9. Those who dispute the report include Corcos, *The nature* 264–8; Cherif, *Encore* 67–9; and Davidson, *Moses Maimonides* 16. Bennison takes no clear position on the reliability of the Arabic sources, but states that they require contextualization, see her Almohad *tawḥīd* 196–9.

22 See al-Dhahabī, *Tārikh al-Islām* (the 1987 edition in 42 volumes), and *Sīyar* (the 1986 edition in 23 volumes).

To carry out this analysis, in this study written in honor of the late, Dr. Donald P. Little (1932–2017) and as a token of the gratitude I feel toward him as a teacher—not to mention my admiration for him as a scholar—I adapt his principle of comparison as my main historiographic method. In *An introduction to Mamlūk historiography*, Little demonstrated the value of a “close word-by-word comparison of individual accounts of topics within annals and biographies”²³ as a technique for evaluating the works of middle period Muslim historians. In turn, I make simple comparisons between Ayyūbid and Mamlūk-era reports on ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s persecution of the Jews and Christians to demonstrate that Mashriqī historians did not rely on their imaginations, but on eyewitness Maghribī informants. The process of comparison also underlines the fact that, despite their geographic distance from the Maghrib, Mashriqī historians preserved the accounts of important sources now lost to us, they exaggerated less, and were less polemical than has been alleged.²⁴ Indeed, Mashriqī sources can help us to understand the more enigmatic reports by Jewish, Christian, and Muslim historians of the Maghrib, and thereby allow clear patterns of events to emerge and strengthen the hypothesis that Muwaḥḥid rule was associated with intolerance for Judaism and Christianity.

1 The Rise of the Muwaḥḥidūn

The Muwaḥḥid movement originated with Muḥammad b. Tūmart (d. c. 524/1130), an ascetic and jurist (*faqīh*) from the High Atlas of Morocco, whose theological writings emphasized God’s oneness (*tawḥīd*).²⁵ Upon his return to the Maghrib after a period of study in the Mashriq, he endeavored to “command right and forbid wrong”²⁶ by launching a series of virulent polemical attacks against the Murabiṭūn (active c. 437–541/1046–1147), who had united the Maghrib al-Aqṣā (lit., the ‘far west’) and al-Andalus under their sultanate by promoting the *sharʿ* norms of the Mālikī school of law.²⁷ Ibn Tūmart, however, accused the Murabiṭūn of anthropomorphism (*tajsīm*); this meant they were guilty of unbelief (*kufṛ*) and thus, from a legal point of view, legitimized a

23 Little, *An introduction* 2. Little also contributed articles on ‘Abd al-Mu’min, Abū Yūsuf Ya’qūb al-Manṣūr, and Ibn Tūmart for the *McGraw-Hill encyclopedia of world biography*.

24 For critical overviews of Mashriqī sources, see Corcos, *The nature* 263–75; Molénat, *Sur le rôle* 394–404; Bennison, *Almohad tawḥīd* 196–9; Cherif, *Encore* 67–70; and Davidson, *Moses Maimonides* 15–9.

25 On Ibn Tūmart’s biography and doctrines, see García-Arenal, *Messianism* 157–92.

26 *Ibid.* 164–5.

27 *Ibid.* 98–103.

Muwaḥḥid *jihād* against them.²⁸ Indeed, in a letter addressed to the Muwaḥḥid community, Ibn Tūmart declared that *jihād* against the sinning Murabiṭūn is more than twice as important as fighting the Christians (Rūm).²⁹ Muwaḥḥid fighters were mostly drawn from the tribes of Ibn Tūmart's own Maṣmūda Berber confederacy and their socioeconomic competition with and ethnic prejudice against the Ṣanhāja Murabiṭūn³⁰ helped fuel the flames of the Muwaḥḥid revolution.

Yet, Ibn Tūmart was unsuccessful in overthrowing the Murabiṭūn during his lifetime, though, in the minds of his followers, he lived on as a divinely-appointed Mahdī.³¹ It took the leadership of an outsider—a Zanāta Berber—and Ibn Tūmart's most beloved disciple, the eventual *khalīfat al-Mahdī*, 'Abd al-Mu'min, to bring the Muwaḥḥid movement any tangible success.³² Thanks to his skill on the battlefield and political acumen, 'Abd al-Mu'min conquered the cities of the Murabiṭ Empire one by one, and took their capital Marrakesh in the late spring of 541/1147. He then turned his attention to overthrowing the neighboring Ḥammādids (r. 404–547/1015–1152) of Bijāya (Bougie) and Zīrids (r. 361–543/972–1148) of Tunis, making himself master of most of North Africa and al-Andalus.³³

'Abd al-Mu'min's years of conquest were also characterized by his zeal to convert all the residents of his empire—Muslims in particular³⁴—to Ibn Tūmart's form of Islamic “unitarianism.” In the so-called *Risālat al-fuṣūl*, a circular letter sent to the Muwaḥḥid religious hierarchy instructing them about how to indoctrinate the common people, he tells them to make them memorize and recite the Muwaḥḥid creed (*ʿaqīda*), known as *al-Murshida*, on pain of death.³⁵ The pro-Muwaḥḥid “memoirs” of Ibn Tūmart's acolyte al-Baydhaq

28 On the alleged anthropomorphism of the Murabiṭūn, see Serrano Ruano, ¿Por qué 815–52.

29 Lévi-Provençal, *Lettres* 15; see also Lagardère, *Le ḡihad almohade* 618.

30 On the various Berber confederacies active during this period, see Brett and Fentress, *The Berbers* 81–153.

31 García-Arenal, *Messianism* 167–71.

32 Fierro, *Las genealogías* 77–107.

33 For 'Abd al-Mu'min's campaigns, see Merad, 'Abd al-Mu'min à la conquête 109–60. For the history of the Ḥammādids and Zīrids, see Idris, *La Berbérie orientale*.

34 As Bennison reminds us, “any analysis of the impact of [Muwaḥḥid] *tawḥīd* on non-Muslims must integrate also its implications for Muslims”; see her Almohad *tawḥīd* 196. See also Corcos, *The nature* 284–5; Cherif, *Encore* 66; and Empey, *The mothers*, where I argue that the Muwaḥḥidūn practice of taking Muslim concubines was another manifestation of their persecution of normative Muslims.

35 Lévi-Provençal, *Lettres* 23.

(d. after 558/1163)³⁶ also provide us with candid descriptions of violent purges (*i'tirāf*) carried out by 'Abd al-Mu'min on so-called apostates from the early Muwaḥḥid community.³⁷ In 'Abd al-Mu'min's lands, any perceived disloyalty to the Mahdī or his caliph was branded *kufr* and punishable by death.

The overthrow of the Murabiṭūn, who were vassals of the 'Abbāsids of Baghdad,³⁸ quickly attracted the attention of eastern historians, to whom we owe some of our earliest reports on Ibn Tūmart and 'Abd al-Mu'min. Basing himself on testimonies and letters by Maghribīs, in his *Tārīkh Dimashq*, Ibn al-Qalānisi (d. 555/1160, the historian of the crusades) refers to the Muwaḥḥidūn as rebels (*khawārij*); he stresses the chaos and bloodiness of their revolution and affirms that 'Abd al-Mu'min had killed so many men, women, and children that his fame had spread to other countries.³⁹ Likewise, in his *Tārīkh Mayyāfāriqīn wa-Āmid*, Ibn al-Azraq (d. after 572/1176–7, an Artuqid historian), says that 'Abd al-Mu'min would kill all the inhabitants when he conquered a city, then call himself the "Lord of the age" (*ṣāhib al-zamān*)⁴⁰ and spread terror among the Maghribīs.⁴¹

Early Mashriqī sources do not mention Maghribī *dhimmīs* as being among the casualties of the Muwaḥḥid revolution, nor do they refer to their fate. By contrast, medieval Jewish sources of the same period are particularly vocal in insisting that Maghribī Jews were subjected to harsh oppression concomitant with the rise of the Muwaḥḥidūn.⁴² Composed around 1161 CE, the *Sefer ha-Qabbala* (Book of tradition) by the Jewish-Andalusī polymath Abraham b. Da'ūd (d. 1180) claims that the "sword of Ibn Tūmart" imposed apostasy, exile, and persecution on the Jews, and wiped out their communities from southern Portugal to Tunisia.⁴³ A famous lament by the Jewish-Spanish poet

36 We know almost nothing about the life of Abū Bakr b. 'Alī l-Ṣanhājī, nicknamed al-Baydhaq, who claimed to have been a follower of Ibn Tūmart from the time of the latter's sojourn in Egypt and whose *Kitāb akhbār al-Mahdī b. Tūmart wa-ibtidā' dawlat al-Muwaḥḥidīn* (his memoirs) was completed during the reign of 'Abd al-Mu'min's son Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf (r. 558–80/1163–84).

37 Al-Baydhaq, *Les mémoires* 181–5; see also García-Arenal, *Messianism* 171–2.

38 For an overview of Murabiṭ history, see Brett and Fentress, *The Berbers* 99–112.

39 Gabrieli, *Le origini* 1–7; and Corcos, *The nature* 281.

40 Both Ibn al-Qalānisi and Ibn al-Azraq assigned messianic titles to Ibn Tūmart and 'Abd al-Mu'min.

41 Ibn al-Azraq, *Tārīkh Mayyāfāriqīn* 92–3.

42 For overviews of the Jewish sources, see Munk, *Notice* 5–70; Corcos, *The nature* 259–64; Hirschberg, *A history* i, 117–39; Davidson, *Moses Maimonides* 9–28; Kraemer, *Maimonides* 91–124; Bennison and Gallego, *Jewish trading* 37–40; and Cherif, *Encore* 70–2.

43 Abraham b. Da'ūd was born in Cordoba and fled to Toledo in 1147 CE during the Muwaḥḥid revolution; see Davidson, *Moses Maimonides* 11; and Bennison and Gallego, *Jewish trading* 38.

and philosopher Abraham b. Ezra (1089–1167)—revised and updated by later authors—likewise attests to the complete destruction of the Jewish communities of the Maghrib.⁴⁴ Furthermore, based on letters attributed to the great Jewish philosopher and rabbi Moses Maimonides (d. 1204), who left the Maghrib in the late 1160s, many scholars have hypothesized that he and his family were obliged to live as crypto-Jews until they immigrated to the Mashriq.⁴⁵

Here, we may also note one of the only Muwaḥḥid-era Muslim Maghribī sources to refer to persecution of Jews under the Muwaḥḥidūn. In his *al-Mann bi-l-imāma*, Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Ṣalāt (d. after 600/1203), the historian of the Muwaḥḥidūn, mentions that, in 557/1162, the Jews of Granada who had converted to Islam by force (*al-yahūd al-islāmīyyīn ... alladhīna aslamū ‘alā kurh*) participated in an unsuccessful revolt against Muwaḥḥid rulers in the city.⁴⁶ The converted Jews and their allies sought the support of the Banū Mardaniš, a prominent eastern Andalusian family that resisted Muwaḥḥid rule until 568/1172. Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Ṣalāt used highly polemical and violent language to reproach those who apostatized from or resisted the Muwaḥḥidūn, including the Banū Mardaniš and their Jewish and Christian allies.⁴⁷ This event may explain why ‘Abd al-Mu‘min might have wanted to eliminate minority communities from his realm, that is, he feared that they would not be loyal to the new regime and might seek help from outside coreligionists. Be that as it may, other than telling us that there were Jews in Granada who converted to Islam by force sometime before the events he describes, Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Ṣalāt does not offer any other reasons for or circumstances surrounding the situation of religious minorities under the Muwaḥḥidūn.

With regard to medieval Christian sources, our most important report comes from the *Cronica Adefonsi Imperatoris* (*Chronicle of Alfonso the Emperor*), which chronicles the years from 1126 to 1157 and was completed in Castile

44 Davidson, *Moses Maimonides* 12; and Bennison and Gallego, Jewish trading 38.

45 Munk, Notice 5–70 believes that Maimonides was forced to convert. Two recent biographies of the great rabbi take divergent views of the matter. While Kraemer argues persuasively that Maimonides was forced to convert (*Maimonides* 91–124); Davidson is highly skeptical about his forced conversion and that of Maghribī Jews as a whole (*Moses Maimonides* 20–8).

46 Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Ṣalāt, *Tārīkh al-mann* 123–4. Cherif cites a poem by Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Ṣalāt in which he says that ‘Abd al-Mu‘min “broke the crosses” in all the synagogues (or churches?) in the Ifrīqiyan city of Mahdiyya, when it was abandoned by the Norman crusaders of Sicily; see Cherif, *Encore* 69.

47 Jones, “The Christian companion” 793–829.

and Leon for Alfonso VII.⁴⁸ It states that when the Muwaḥḥidūn crossed the Straits of Gibraltar to al-Andalus:

They inhabited these places, and they killed the nobles and the Christians who were called Mozarabs. They also killed the Jews who had been living in southern Spain since ancient times. The homes, riches and wives of the men were seized and kept by the Almohades.... About this time many thousands of Christian knights and infantrymen accompanied by their bishop and a large group of clerics came from North Africa to Spain. They journeyed from the South to Toledo. These were the Christian prisoners mentioned above who had been living in the court of King Ali⁴⁹ and also in the court of his son Texufin.⁵⁰

The Christian “prisoners” in the text were more likely the many Christian mercenaries employed by the Murābiṭūn. Indeed, the reliance of the Murābiṭūn on Christian and possibly also Jewish soldiers⁵¹ and mercenaries may have been yet another threat that ‘Abd al-Mu’min sought to remove by eliminating religious minorities from his realms. He himself had been tracked by ‘Alī b. Yūsuf b. Tāshfin’s high-ranking Catalan mercenary, Reverter, during the early days of guerilla warfare during the Muwaḥḥid revolution.⁵² Interestingly, while one of Reverter’s sons left for Christian Europe after the fall of the Murābiṭūn, another son, ‘Alī, converted to Islam so that he could remain in the service of the Muwaḥḥidūn.⁵³

While the Jewish and Christian sources mentioned thus far only devote a few lines to the Muwaḥḥid persecution of religious minorities, an invaluable testimony has survived from the Cairo Geniza, in the form of a letter composed around January 542/1148 (in Fustāt) in Judeo-Arabic by the merchant Solomon ha-Kohen and destined for his father in South Arabia.⁵⁴ Relying primarily on

48 For discussions of this source, see Molénat, *Sur le rôle* 395–6; and Clément, Reverter 79–106.

49 The monarchs in question are ‘Alī b. Yūsuf b. Tāshfin (r. 500–37/1106–43), the Murābiṭ sultan, and his son Tāshfin b. ‘Alī (r. 537–9/1143–5).

50 Lipskey, *The chronicle of Alfonso* 160.

51 On Jewish soldiers, or those with Jewish origins under the Murābiṭūn, see Corcos, *The nature* 276–7.

52 On these confrontations, see al-Baydhaq, *Les mémoires* 140–2, 148–51, and 154–6.

53 Clément, Reverter 79–106.

54 I cite Goitein’s English translation verbatim; all transliteration, italics, and brackets are his. I have abbreviated certain sections of the translation that are not relevant to the current study and am also greatly indebted to Goitein’s comments and clarifications that enabled me to better understand the letter; see Goitein, *A Mediterranean society* v, 59–61 and

travelers' reports, the author notes that his own Jewish Maghribī relatives were victims of the Muwaḥḥid revolution.⁵⁵ Given its early composition and the fact that it is highly improbable that the letter circulated beyond Solomon ha-Kohen's family circle, this text is a rare, independent, and near-eyewitness account of events and also serves as a valuable control case upon which to test later reports by Mashriqī historians:

You certainly wish to know the news from the Maghreb.... The travelers have arrived, among them groups of Jews, who were present at the events. They reported that 'Abd al-Mu'min the Sūsī [from the Sūs region in western Morocco]⁵⁶ attacked the Amīr Tāshfin in Wahrān [Oran], besieged him, annihilated his army, killed him, and crucified his body. Then 'Abd al-Mu'min conquered Tilimsān [Tlemçen] and killed everyone in the town, except those who *apostatized*.⁵⁷ When the news arrived in Sijilmāsa, the population revolted against their Amīr, declared themselves in public as opponents of the Murābiṭūn [Almoravids], drove them out of town, and sent messengers to 'Abd al-Mu'min surrendering it to him. After he entered Sijilmāsa, he assembled the Jews and asked them to *apostatize*. Negotiations went on for seven months, during all of which they fasted and prayed. After this a new amīr arrived and demanded their conversion. They refused, and a hundred and fifty Jews were killed, *sanctifying the name of God*.... The others apostatized; the first of the apostates was Joseph b. 'Imrān, the judge of Sijilmāsa.... Before 'Abd al-Mu'min entered Sijilmāsa, when the population rose against the Almoravids, a number of Jews, about two hundred, took refuge in the city's fortress. Among them were Mār Ya'qūb [Jacob] and 'Abbūd, my paternal uncles, Mār Judah b. Farḥūn, and [one word]. They are now in Der'ā,⁵⁸ after everything they had was taken from them. What happened to them afterward we do not know.... Of all the countries of the Almoravids there remained in the

521–2. For other translations and overviews of the letter, see Hirschberg, *A history* i, 127–9; Corcos, *The nature* 261–2; Davidson, *Moses Maimonides* 10; and Kraemer, *Maimonides* 94–7.

55 As Goitein clarifies, the family was originally from the Saharan city of Sijilmāsa: *A Mediterranean society* v, 60 and 521 n. 63.

56 Ibn Tūmart was from the Sūs; 'Abd al-Mu'min was not.

57 This could mean that only the Jews were forced to convert, or that all residents of Tilimsān, both Muslim and non-Muslim, had to embrace the Muwaḥḥid creed; see Goitein, *A Mediterranean society* v, 521 n. 59.

58 A revision of Abraham b. Ezra's lament in the Cairo Geniza states that the Jews of Dar'ā faced the same fate as those of Sijilmāsa, and most of them chose death over conversion; see Davidson, *Moses Maimonides* 12.

hands of all dissenters only Der'ā and Miknāsa [Meknes]. As to the *congregations* of the West, *because of* [our] sins, they all perished; there has not remained a single one described as a Jew between Bijāya [Bougie]⁵⁹ and the Gate [street] of Gibraltar, they either apostatized or were killed. At 'Abd al-Mu'min's conquest of Fez 100,000 persons were killed and at that of Marrākesh 120,000. Take notice of this. This is not hearsay, but a report of people who were present at the events. Take notice.⁶⁰

As we will see, much of Solomon ha-Kohen's letter was to be corroborated by Mashriqī historians, including the choice given to the Jews and Christians to apostasize, be killed, or flee; thus, giving the impression that no religious minorities remained in the Maghrib under the Muwaḥḥidūn.

2 The Evidence of the *Émigrés*

Educated and elite Muwaḥḥid-era émigrés from the Maghrib to the Mashriq provide us with a majority of the testimonies about the Muwaḥḥid persecution of *dhimmīs*. Chief among these is the Zīrid prince and historian, 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Shaddād (d. after 582/1186), who is thought to have spent time in Sicily and possibly at the Muwaḥḥid court before immigrating to the East and ending his days in Damascus.⁶¹ His now lost historical work, *al-Jam' wa-l-bayān fī akhbār al-Qayrawān*, to which we may assign a *terminus ad quem* of 582/1186, circulated in both the Maghrib and Mashriq.⁶² Extensive citations from the *Jam'* about the Muwaḥḥid period can be found in Ibn al-Athīr's *al-Kāmil fī l-tārīkh*, al-Nuwayrī's *Nihāyat al-'Arab fī funūn al-adab*, al-Dhahabī's *Tārīkh al-Islām*, and also in the *Rihla* of 'Abdallāh b. Muḥammad al-Tijānī (d. after 711/1311), the Ifrīqī man of letters.⁶³ If we compare passages from *al-Kāmil* to similar reports in al-Tijānī and al-Dhahabī that explicitly cite Ibn Shaddād, it becomes clear that the Zīrid prince was also one of Ibn al-Athīr's main sources for the Muwaḥḥid period, even if he does not name him as such.

59 Solomon ha-Kohen's chronology of Muwaḥḥid conquests given here may be incorrect. For an attempt at reconciling the dates given in the letter and al-Baydhaq, see Hirschberg, *A history* i, 128.

60 Goitein, *A Mediterranean society* v, 60–1.

61 Idris, *La Berbérie orientale* i, xviii–ix; and Johns, *Arabic administration* 87–8.

62 Johns notes that, according to Brett, there were likely two “editions” of Ibn Shaddād's work: an earlier Maghribī version and a later Mashriqī one; see Johns, *Arabic administration* 87–8; cf. Corcos, *The nature* 269, n. 38; and Bennison, *Almohad tawḥīd* 197.

63 Plessner and El Achèche, *al-Tidjānī*.

Hence, *al-Kāmil* relates that, during the Muwaḥḥid conquest of Ifrīqiya, in 554/1159–60, the leaders of Tunis held a meeting with ‘Abd al-Mu’min in an attempt to guarantee their personal security and determine the terms of surrender. The text then turns to the nature of ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s occupation of the city:

He [‘Abd al-Mu’min] sent people to prevent troops from entering [the city] and he sent clerks to administer the levy on the people. He remained [in Tunis] for three days and he offered Islam to the Jews and Christians there and whoever converted was unharmed and whoever refused was killed.⁶⁴

‘Abd al-Mu’min thus offered the *dhimmīs* of Tunis the same choice given to the Jews of Sijilmāsa: conversion or death. Nothing more is said in *al-Kāmil* about the matter, and the singularity of Ibn al-Athīr’s report prompted Corcos to declare, “The decree in Tunis was an exception!”⁶⁵

In his *Riḥla*, al-Tijānī, who was closely affiliated to the Muwaḥḥid-oriented Ḥafṣid dynasty (r. 627–982/1229–1574)⁶⁶ of Tunis, quotes exactly the same passage (the offer of Islam or death to the Jews and Christians of Tunis) as Ibn al-Athīr recorded.⁶⁷ Thus, the presumably pro-Muwaḥḥid westerner has as much or as little to say about the forced conversion of *dhimmīs* as the easterner Ibn al-Athīr, giving us the sense that this was simply one anecdote among others about ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s conquest of Ifrīqiya.

In the necrology of ‘Abd al-Mu’min, however, Ibn al-Athīr provides us with an overall judgment of the first Muwaḥḥid caliph which emphasizes the caliph’s violence and intractability in religious matters and which is worth quoting, given that it was echoed in later sources:

[‘Abd al-Mu’min] was intelligent, forceful, of sound judgment, a good manager of state business, generous with money and yet he shed much blood of Muslims for minor faults. He revered and strengthened the cause of religion and obliged the people on all his lands to attend prayers. Anyone seen not praying at prayer time was put to death.⁶⁸

64 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil* xi, 242. My translation follows Ibn al-Athīr, *The chronicle* ii, 104 al-most verbatim.

65 Corcos, *The nature* 284.

66 On the relationship between the Muwaḥḥidūn and the Ḥafṣids, see Rouighi, *The making* 28–34.

67 Al-Tijānī, *Riḥlat* 347.

68 Ibn al-Athīr, *The chronicle* ii, 139.

Moreover, the decree in Tunis seems not to have been an exception. Al-Nuwayrī, who borrows from Ibn al-Athīr almost word-for-word when writing about the Muwaḥḥidūn, repeats the report about the Jews and Christians of Tunis.⁶⁹ But, *sub anno* 558/1163, the year of ‘Abd al-Mu‘min’s death, he cites a long anecdote, which he attributes directly to Ibn Shaddād, but which is not present in either *al-Kāmil* or the *Riḥla*. When ‘Abd al-Mu‘min conquered Bijāya, a merchant’s bundle of wares was stolen. The caliph decided to behead all the suspected culprits to teach the people of the conquered land a lesson; he also killed all the jurists who objected to this harsh collective punishment.⁷⁰ This tale of woe is then followed by a comment on the situation of Christians (and also Jews)⁷¹ in Muwaḥḥid lands:

He [Ibn Shaddād] said: There is not one polytheist (*mushrik*) in his land and no church (*kanīsa*)⁷² in any part of it because when he [‘Abd al-Mu‘min] got hold of any Muslim land he did not suffer the *dhimmīs* in it but to offer them [conversion to] Islam. And whoever converted was safe; and whoever wanted to go to Christian territory (*bilād al-naṣārā*) was allowed to do so. And whoever opposed him was killed. Thus, all the people of his kingdom are Muslims and others [non-Muslims] do not mingle with them [Maghribī Muslims].⁷³

This citation is particularly important, for it is repeated almost word-for-word in other texts, thus suggesting that Ibn Shaddād popularized the idea that the Muwaḥḥidūn had completely abolished the *dhimma* pact in the Maghrib. He also mentions the idea that *dhimmīs* were allowed to flee to Christian territory, just as the faraway *Cronica Adefonsi Imperatoris* relates. This makes him the second independent witness to the Muwaḥḥid persecution of the Jews and Christians writing in the Mashriq after Solomon ha-Kohen.

We should not discount the fact that, as a refugee, Ibn Shaddād might have found it advantageous to expose the unorthodox nature of the Muwaḥḥidūn in the courts of the Muslim East. At the time of his writing, the Ayyūbids and the Muwaḥḥidūn were competing for control over Libya and the trans-Saharan

69 Al-Nuwayrī’s text is identical to that of Ibn al-Athīr’s except that he uses the verb *abā* instead of *imtana’a* for “refused”; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat* xxiv, 181.

70 Ibn Shaddād states that he heard this anecdote in Sicily; *ibid.* xxiv, 175–6.

71 Al-Dhahabī, who quotes the same passage from Ibn Shaddād, mentions both Jews and Christians; see his *Tārīkh al-Islām* xxxviii, 257.

72 The word *kanīsa* (pl. *kanā’is*) can refer to both churches and synagogues. However, given that most reports use *biya’* for synagogues, I have translated *kanīsa* as church here.

73 Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat* xxiv, 176.

trade routes.⁷⁴ Indeed, the Banū Ghāniya, a remaining branch of the Murābiṭūn, had forged an alliance with the Ayyūbids, for which they also sought the blessing of the ‘Abbāsid caliph, al-Nāṣir (r. 575–622/1180–1225);⁷⁵ this underscores the fact that the Muwaḥḥidūn were ultimately rebels against ‘Abbāsid caliphal authority. Yet, can we accuse Ibn Shaddād of being polemical because he mentions that those who resisted conversion were killed by ‘Abd al-Mu’min? This is, in fact, in keeping with the self-perception and unapologetic practice of the Muwaḥḥidūn, and their annihilation of all those who opposed their doctrines, such as the Murābiṭūn and even dissenting Muwaḥḥidūn.

A second important émigré historian is ‘Abd al-Wāḥid al-Marrākushī (d. after 621/1224). Born and educated in Morocco, where he seems to have spent time at the Muwaḥḥid court, al-Marrākushī made his way to the Muslim East for unknown reasons sometime around 613/1217. There he composed his *Kitāb al-mu’jib fī talkhīṣ akhbār al-Maghrib* at the behest of an Ayyūbid vizier. Al-Marrākushī’s history seems to have circulated primarily in the Mashriq until it was used by the famed Maghribī historian, Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406).⁷⁶ While some tend to doubt al-Marrākushī’s reliability,⁷⁷ the passages in his work related to the Muwaḥḥid persecution of the *ahl al-dhimma* can be substantiated by other sources. Indeed, in a passage reminiscent of Ibn Shaddād, he says: “So [in the Maghrib] we have not abided by a covenant of protection (*dhimma*) with the Jews and Christians since the Maṣmūda came to power and in all of the Western lands of the Muslims there are no synagogues (*biyaʿ*) and not a church (*kanīsa*).”⁷⁸

As one who was benefiting from the patronage of a high-ranking Ayyūbid official and who, like Ibn Shaddād, lived in the Muslim East during the reign of the aforementioned ‘Abbāsid caliph al-Nāṣir, al-Marrākushī might have written with the intention of confirming his benefactors’ suspicions about the extreme policies of the Muwaḥḥidūn. Yet, al-Marrākushī also contributes new and valid evidence about the continuation of the anti-*dhimmī* stance of the Muwaḥḥidūn by describing the situation of the Jews under the reign of ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s grandson, Abū Yūsuf Ya’qūb al-Manṣūr (r. 580–95/1184–99):

74 Baadj, Saladin 267–95.

75 Ibid. 274–5.

76 Al-Marrākushī, *Mu’jib* v–xxi, see Dozy’s preface. I have also greatly benefited from Huici Miranda’s translation of and commentary on the *Mu’jib*, see al-Marrākushī, *Lo Admirable*.

77 Dozy first pointed out the severe limitations of the *Mu’jib*; see also Corcos, The nature 268–71.

78 Al-Marrākushī, *al-Mu’jib* 223; al-Marrākushī, *Lo Admirable* 251–2.

Abū Yūsuf was prompted to think of singling them out and differentiating them [i.e., the Jews] by that costume⁷⁹ because of his doubts about their Islam. He would say: "If I were sure of their Islam, I would give them leave to mingle with the Muslims when it came to their marriages and their daily affairs. And if I were sure of their unbelief (*kufṛ*), I would kill their men, take their children into captivity and take their property as *ḡay'* [spoils] for the Muslims, but I'm hesitant in their case." ... Rather [continues al-Marrākushī], our Jews outwardly profess Islam, pray in the mosques and teach their children the Quran following our religion and our Sunna. God only knows what is really in their hearts and what is going on in their homes.⁸⁰

This report is largely confirmed by the *Kitāb al-istibṣār* (*terminus ad quem* 587/1191), an anonymous work of geography begun during the Murābiṭūn period and completed by a reviser (*nāẓir*), or second anonymous author, under the patronage of the Muwaḥḥidūn.⁸¹ The original Murābiṭ-era author gives a general description of Sijilmāsa and its inhabitants, mentioning that the Jews there were restricted to the trade of masonry. The Muwaḥḥid-era author, writing during the reign of Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr, then adds the following update:

Nowadays they [i.e., the Jews] are the merchants and the wealthy men *par excellence* of this land, especially in the city of Fez, for I have seen many of whom it is said that they possess vast wealth. The Lofty Authority [i.e., the Muwaḥḥidūn] (may God prolong its Days!) gave its attention to them in 582/1186 but those who took bribes concealed, those who created confusion confused, and the inspectors were terrorized, so divine decree which goes before postponed this until the end of the period of their might (*'izz*) and the beginning of their decline,⁸² if God wills, and their dispersion, that is, the year 591/1194⁸³.... But now they have mingled with the Muslims and insinuated themselves among them, and that is

79 According to al-Marrākushī, Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr made Jews wear a kind of strange black dress with long sleeves that reached their feet and long caps as well. This costume was later changed to a yellow costume and turban; see Hopkins, *Medieval* 60–1.

80 Al-Marrākushī, *al-Mu'jib* 223; al-Marrākushī, *Lo Admirable* 251–2.

81 On this text, see Levtzion, *The twelfth-century* 201–17.

82 I interpret this to mean that, since the Muwaḥḥidūn were unable to stop the rise to power of the wealthy converted Jews in 582/1186, they decided to leave the matter to a later time period, according to the will of God.

83 The author seems to be projecting forward here, anticipating the downfall of the Jews in the future; see Levtzion and Hopkins (eds.), *Corpus* 394, n. 11.

the might which they looked forward to in former times; and after it will come the downfall which is drawing near to them and will break, if God wills, their backs, and will extirpate them soon, as we have said.⁸⁴

The key insight we can glean from these two passages is that the persecution of the Jews by the Muwaḥḥidūn continued after the reign of ‘Abd al-Mu‘min and that their forced conversion ultimately created strange dilemmas for his successors. As Hopkins posits, “Officially there were no Jews or Christians; practically there were.”⁸⁵

Not long after al-Marrākushī, the Ayyūbid bureaucrat, ‘Alī b. Yūsuf al-Qiftī (d. 646/1248),⁸⁶ in his *Ikhbār al-‘ulamā’ bi-akhbār al-ḥukamā’* or *Tārīkh al-ḥukamā’*, discusses ‘Abd al-Mu‘min’s abolishment of the *dhimma* in connection with the biography of yet another émigré, Maimonides. While some remain doubtful about the reliability of his work,⁸⁷ al-Qiftī’s initial observations are in keeping with the texts we have examined thus far:

‘Abd al-Mu‘min b. ‘Alī al-Kūmī the Berber, who gained possession of the Maghrib, proclaimed in all the lands which he ruled that Jews and Christians were to be expelled from them. He appointed a time limit and stipulated that whoever adopted Islam could remain in his place and continue to earn his livelihood, on the same terms and with the same obligations as the Muslims, but whoever remained in the religion of his community was to leave by the appointed time. If he remained beyond that date under the jurisdiction of the Sultan, then his life and property were forfeit. When this order was put into effect, he whose possessions weighed lightly on him departed, and he whose wealth was great or who was attached to his household and his property remained, making a show of Islam and concealing his unbelief. Mūsā b. Maymūn was one of those who did this....⁸⁸

84 Ibid. 140–1. I have reproduced Hopkins’ translation verbatim; the additions in round brackets are those of the editors, while the additions in square brackets are mine. For the Arabic text, see *Kitāb al-istibṣār* 202.

85 Hopkins, *Medieval* 61.

86 Dietrich, Ibn al-Qiftī.

87 Munk, Notice 37–47 places great store in al-Qiftī’s biography of Maimonides, in contrast to Corcos, The nature 260, n. 1. More recently, Davidson, *Moses Maimonides* 17–20, pointed out several inaccuracies in al-Qiftī’s work, whereas Kraemer, *Maimonides* 118–9, follows Munk in positing that al-Qiftī was friends with Maimonides’ disciple Joseph Ben Judah and so had access to reliable first-hand information about the famous rabbi.

88 Lewis, *Islam* ii, 189–92; al-Qiftī, *Tārīkh* 317–9.

Maimonides' problems with the Muwaḥḥidūn nevertheless continued after he had established himself in the Mashriq:

In the later part of his life he was troubled by a man from Andalus, a jurist [*faqīh*] called Abū'l-'Arab ibn Ma'īsha,⁸⁹ who came to Fustāt and met him. He charged him with having been a Muslim in Andalus, accused him [of apostasy] and wanted to have him punished. 'Abd al-Raḥīm ibn 'Alī al-Fāḍil prevented this, and said to him, "If a man is converted by force, his Islam is not legally valid."⁹⁰

By introducing Maimonides as an alleged victim of 'Abd al-Mu'min's policy, al-Qiftī confirms the ongoing problem of Maghribī forced converts. He was also the first Mashriqī historian to criticize 'Abd al-Mu'min's stance toward *dhimmīs* and understanding of the law. By quoting no less than al-Qāḍī l-Fāḍil (529–96/1135–1200), the head of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's chancellery,⁹¹ al-Qiftī makes it clear that, according to *shar'ī* norms, forced conversion to Islam is not valid, to contrast the authority of the learned Ayyūbid secretary with the ignorance of the obscure *faqīh* from the west. Ibn Tūmart himself was frequently dismissively referred to as "the *faqīh* from the Sūs" in Mashriqī chronicles. Indeed, in a later century, the famed Ḥanbalī jurist Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) issued a *fatwā* about the Muwaḥḥid creed, wherein he condemned Ibn Tūmart for authorizing the killing of thousands of innocent Mālikīs and reviled the Maḥdī's poor understanding of Islamic law and theology, and blamed him for taking advantage of his rural followers' ignorance of Islam.⁹²

3 Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī and al-Dhahabī

Under the year 542/1147, the year of the Muwaḥḥid conquest of Marrakesh, Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī inserted a report (in *Mir'āt al-zamān*), on 'Abd al-Mu'min's abolishment of the *dhimma* and it delves deeper into the caliph's actions than anything we have seen thus far. Sibṭ does not treat 'Abd al-Mu'min's life and career in much depth in the *Mir'āt*; though he devotes long passages to the second and third Muwaḥḥid caliphs, Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf (d. 580/1184) and

89 For an attempt to connect al-Qiftī's report on Maimonides with al-Dhahabī's biography of Abū l-'Arab b. Ma'īsha, see Munk, Review 329–30.

90 Lewis, *Islam* ii, 189–92; al-Qiftī, *Tārīkh* 317–9.

91 Brockelmann and Cahen, al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil.

92 Laoust, Une *fatwā* 170–2; Laoust dates this *fatwā* to 709/1310.

Ya‘qūb al-Manṣūr (d. 595/1199).⁹³ He also writes far less about ‘Abd al-Mu‘min’s life and deeds than do other Mashriqī chronicles, such as *al-Kāmil*, *Nihāyat al-‘Arab*, and *Tārīkh al-Islām*. The fact that Sibṭ focused on ‘Abd al-Mu‘min’s treatment of the *ahl al-dhimma* in the relatively little space devoted to him in the *Mir‘āt*, hints that he was particularly intrigued by this aspect of his biography. Sibṭ says:⁹⁴

In [the year 542] ‘Abd al-Mu‘min b. ‘Alī took possession of the Moroccan city of Marrakesh by the sword. He killed all those there who opposed him and the populace did not resist. He summoned the Jews and Christians and said: “The Imam al-Mahdī ordered me to instate but one religion amongst the people—Islam.⁹⁵ You have maintained that after 500 years a man would appear who would strengthen your religion (*sharī‘atakum*) but that time has now elapsed. I will let you choose between three options: either you convert to Islam or go to another land (*bi-dār ukhrā*), or you will be killed [lit., your necks will be broken].” And so a group of them converted to Islam and the rest left for another land and he [‘Abd al-Mu‘min] destroyed the churches (*al-kanā’īs*) and synagogues (*al-biyya*) and turned them into mosques and abolished the poll tax (*jizya*). He did this in all of his lands.⁹⁶ Then he distributed what was in the treasury (*bayt al-māl*), swept it up, prayed in it and then ordered the people to enter it and pray, just as ‘Alī [i.e., ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib]⁹⁷ did. He aspired to good conduct to show the people that he was not monopolizing the flow of money and was not storing it away. He elevated the principles of Islam and instituted the prescribed punishments (*ḥudūd*)⁹⁸ according to perfected politics (*al-siyāsa al-kāmila*), and he said: “Whosoever desists

93 Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī, *Mir‘āt* 374–5, 446–9, and 464–7.

94 An almost verbatim version of the first part of Sibṭ’s report can be found in Ibn Taghrī Birdī’s *al-Nujūm* v, 281. I owe the reference to this work to Corcos’s diligence; nevertheless, he is mistaken in drawing on al-Dhahabī, rather than directly from Sibṭ; see Corcos, *The nature* 267–8.

95 Note the helpful variant in Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm* v, 281: “Inna al-Mahdī amaranī allā uqirra al-nass illā ‘alā milla wāḥida, wa-ḥiya al-Islām.”

96 Ibn Taghrī Birdī’s citation from the *Mir‘āt* ends at this point.

97 One of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib’s (d. 40/661) first and most famous acts upon becoming caliph was opening up the treasury and distributing its contents to the Muslims. For the importance of the equitable distribution of the *fay*’ throughout ‘Alī’s caliphate, see Madelung, *The succession* 142–3; 149–50, and 271ff.

98 That is, the punishments prescribed in the Quran for serious offenses such as alcohol consumption and fornication.

from prayer for three days, kill him!”⁹⁹ He upheld order (*al-umūr*) and did not invite abomination (*munkar*) but [sought] to eradicate it. He used to pray the five prayers with the people and read one-seventh of the Quran each day after the morning prayer. He dressed in wool (*ṣūf*) and fasted on Tuesdays and Thursdays. He distributed the spoils of war (*ḡayʾ*) according to the law and so the people loved him. Thus, the people were favorably disposed towards him because he repealed the reprehensible actions of those who had come before.¹⁰⁰

While some elements of Sibṭ’s report are similar to earlier Mashriqī accounts, the many new and even original points introduced in the *Mir’āt* are worthy of analysis, particularly since the current study is the first to use his work as a source for the Muwaḥḥid persecution of the Jews and Christians. To begin, Sibṭ was the first Mashriqī historian to attribute the forced conversion of the Jews and Christians to the doctrines of Ibn Tūmart. While Bennison has found nothing in the extant writings attributed to the Muwaḥḥid Mahdī that explicitly advocated the abolishment of the *dhimma* pact,¹⁰¹ it is possible that some of Ibn Tūmart’s polemical writings may have had repercussions on the *dhimma*. For example, the not-quite-canonical *ḥadīths* Ibn Tūmart used to justify *jihād* against anthropomorphists may have caused his followers to consider the Jews and Christians together with the Murābiṭūn as non-believers, meaning that they should be converted or killed.¹⁰² In a similar vein, Fierro argues that, for the Muwaḥḥidūn, the advent of Ibn Tūmart as Mahdī necessitated the abolishment of all other religious interpretations except that of the Muwaḥḥid sect because the Maghrib had become a “new Hijaz,” and since the Prophet had expelled the Jews from there, they should do the same.¹⁰³ This idea was tied to the belief that the advent of the Mahdī would signal the end of all other religions except Islam.¹⁰⁴

The “new Hijaz” hypothesis may also be supported by Sibṭ’s assertion that Maghribī synagogues and churches were not just destroyed, but converted into mosques. One of the great grievances of the Muwaḥḥidūn against the Murābiṭūn was that the *qiblas* of their mosques were not oriented correctly

99 This echoes Ibn al-Athīr’s necrology of ‘Abd al-Mu’min.

100 Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī, *Mir’āt* 195–6.

101 Bennison, Almohad *tawḥīd* 195–216.

102 Ibid. 208–9. Ibn Tūmart tends to splice together different *ḥadīths* to make his point.

103 Fierro, Conversion 159–60. On the expulsion of Jews, Christians, and polytheists from Arabia, see Ward, A fragment 407–20.

104 Fierro, Conversion 159; and García-Arenal, *Messianism* 184.

toward Mecca; this led the Muwaḥḥidūn to destroy—or at least remodel—all Murābiṭ mosques in the Maghrib.¹⁰⁵ As al-Baydhaq explains, the issue of the *qiblas* initially prompted the conquering Muwaḥḥidūn to refuse to settle in Marrakesh:

The *faqīhs* of the city [Marrakesh] came to find them [the Muwaḥḥidūn] and said: “Why don’t you want to live in our city?”

The Muwaḥḥidūn responded: “Because the *mahdī* refused to, particularly because the mosques of your city are not directed exactly towards the *qibla*. There should be no space or no inclination in mosques for the people of Muḥammad, may the peace and blessings of God be upon him! These deviations are fine for the Jews and others, but not for him!”

“Alright,” the *faqīhs* told them, “the city will be purified so that you can live in it.”

“And how will they be purified?” [the Muwaḥḥidūn asked]

“The mosques will be demolished and we will build new ones.”¹⁰⁶

Thus, it is possible that *ḥadīths* such as “two *qiblas* may not exist in Arabia” or “two *qiblas* may not exist in one land,” which were also understood as “two religions may not exist in Arabia or in the same land,”¹⁰⁷ influenced the Muwaḥḥidūn to destroy non-Muwaḥḥid places of worship in an effort to unify the Maghrib under a single creed. However, it is likely that there were no synagogues or churches in Marrakesh at that time. The Murābiṭūn, who had founded the city, had forbidden the Jews from living there or staying there overnight—they had to come in the morning and leave at nightfall. This was because of a legal prohibition against non-Muslims taking up residence in a new Muslim settlement, a famous historical example being ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib’s rule over Kufa, during which *dhimmīs* entered by day and left at night.¹⁰⁸ With regard to Sibṭ’s report, this is ironic, in that it was the Murābiṭūn—and not the Muwaḥḥidūn—who were more like ‘Alī and more conscientious in their application of the law. It may also indicate that ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s harsh treatment of the *ahl al-dhimma* was in part due to his desire to present himself as even more rigorous in his religious customs than his rivals, the Murābiṭūn.

105 On the distinct orientation of Muwaḥḥid-era *qiblas*, see Bonine, The sacred direction 50–72; and Messier and Miller, *The last civilized* 120–4.

106 Al-Baydhaq, *Les mémoires* 173–4.

107 Ward, A fragment 407–8.

108 On the parallels between Murābiṭ Marrakesh and ‘Alī’s Kufa, see *ibid.* 417.

Sibṭ's reference to the promise made by the Jews and Christians to convert to Islam by 500 AH may, in turn, be an echo of the messianism that was widespread throughout the Jewish diaspora around 500/1107. Many Maghribī Jews believed that their Messiah would appear in the year 500 AH and at least one pretender, Moshé al-Dar'ī, was active in the same Moroccan cities during the time of Ibn Tūmart.¹⁰⁹ A Cairo Geniza letter also describes how the messianic expectations of a Jewish woman in Baghdad led the Saljūqs to imprison the Jews and threaten to convert them to Islam unless a new prophet appeared among them. Sibṭ may have been familiar with this incident, since his grandfather Ibn al-Jawzī alludes to it in his *al-Muntaẓam fī tawārīkh al-mulūk wa-l-umam*.¹¹⁰ It is also plausible that 'Abd al-Mu'min truly believed that the *dhimmīs* would convert to Islam by the year 500 AH and therefore, he used that against them or believed that by forcing them to accept the Ibn Tūmart as the Mahdī, he could definitively settle the Messiah question in favor of the Muwaḥḥidūn.

Stories about the conversion of the Jews in 500 AH may also be something of a historical *topos*. The anonymous eighth-/fourteenth-century Maghribī history, the *Ḥulal al-mawshīyya* (*terminus ad quem* 783/1381), narrates that the Murābiṭ sultan, Yūsuf b. Tāshfīn (d. 500/1106) threatened the Jews of Lucena in al-Andalus with forced conversion based on a *ḥadīth* in one of the books of the Andalusian mystic Ibn Masarra (d. 319/931). This *ḥadīth* claimed that the Jews had promised to convert to Islam by 500 AH if their Messiah did not appear by that time, but the Jews of Lucena paid a large sum of money to Yūsuf b. Tāshfīn to spare themselves conversion.¹¹¹ Thus, it is possible that the story about the Murābiṭūn and the Jews of Lucena influenced Sibṭ's (or his sources') historical account of the confrontation between the Muwaḥḥidūn and the Jews.

Some flattering elements of Sibṭ's portrait of 'Abd al-Mu'min may have originated in Muwaḥḥid-era Maghribī chronicles. 'Abd al-Mu'min's abolishment of the *jizya* and distribution of the *fay* are central to Sibṭ's report and we have seen that Ibn al-Athīr also noted that 'Abd al-Mu'min was "generous with money."¹¹² For his part, al-Baydhaq makes it clear that, throughout his campaigns, 'Abd al-Mu'min tried to distribute the booty among the Muwaḥḥid fighters equitably, but only says that all the riches and captives from the city were brought

109 On the messianic fervor among the Jews of the Maghrib, see García-Arenal, *Messianisme juif* 211–29; and García-Arenal, *Messianism* 147–53.

110 On this incident, see Goitein, *A report* 57–76.

111 García-Arenal, *Messianism* 152; and Corcos, *The nature* 279, n. 73. The *Ḥulal* seems to be the only historical work to mention the incident.

112 On the difficult question of taxing during the Muwaḥḥid period, see Huici Miranda, *Historia política* 215–7.

back to the treasury after the conquest of Marrakesh.¹¹³ However, in his *Naẓm al-jumān*, the Maghribī historian Ibn al-Qaṭṭān (d. after 665/1266), who was closely affiliated with the regime,¹¹⁴ states that ‘Abd al-Mu’min “distributed money two or three times a month, depending on the state of the treasury.”¹¹⁵ It is unlikely that Sibṭ had access to the *Naẓm*, given that Ibn al-Qaṭṭān would have completed his chronicle after the death of Sibṭ. Nevertheless, both may have drawn on the same corpus of pro-Muwaḥḥid Maghribī histories, large portions of which are now lost to us. For example, like Sibṭ, Ibn al-Qaṭṭān mentions that ‘Abd al-Mu’min wore *ṣūf* (wool), based on a quote from *al-Mann bi-l-imāma* of Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Ṣalāt. Ibn al-Qaṭṭān also says that the caliph fasted on Tuesdays and Thursdays and made his sons pray the five canonical prayers and learn a *ḥizb* of the Qur’an,¹¹⁶ much like Sibṭ claimed.

The comparison of ‘Abd al-Mu’min to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, however, seems to be Sibṭ’s invention—perhaps even an indication of his alleged ‘Alid leanings.¹¹⁷ ‘Alī was, of course, well known for his devotion to the strict letter of the law, just as Sibṭ portrays ‘Abd al-Mu’min to be. Sibṭ’s reference to ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s “perfected politics” (*al-siyāsa al-kāmila*) no doubt says more about Sibṭ’s own religious and political views than it does about ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s rule.¹¹⁸ As Khalidi explains:

The formula that the *sharī’a* was perfected *siyasa* (*al-sharī’a hiya al-siyasa al-kāmila*) was one to which Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzi was often to return in order to express the view that state policy in his days was dangerously close to supplanting sacred law.... For Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzi, there was no need to look any further than the *sharī’a* for the conduct of government and the establishment of justice. To exercise *siyasa* was to admit that the *sharī’a* was inadequate.¹¹⁹

The only question here is whether we are to believe Sibṭ’s assertion that ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s politics were in perfect keeping with the *sharī’a* or follow al-Qiftī and al-Qāḍī l-Fāḍil’s view that forced conversions were against the sacred law. Further analysis of Sibṭ’s views toward the *ahl al-dhimma* is beyond the scope

113 Al-Baydhaq, *Les mémoires* 174.

114 On this historian, see Fricaud, *Les ṭalaba* 336–7.

115 Ibn al-Qaṭṭān, *Naẓm* 171–2.

116 Ibid. 172.

117 Guo, *Early Mamluk* i, 17, n. 89.

118 See Khalidi, *Arabic historical* 195–6; Khalidi references Sibṭ’s attribution of this principle to ‘Abd al-Mu’min at 196, n. 33.

119 Ibid. 195–6.

of the current study, however. We do know that Sibṭ was frustrated with the inability of Mashriqī rulers' to keep Jerusalem out of Frankish hands¹²⁰ and we can imagine that, in the climate of the crusades during which he lived, the actions of 'Abd al-Mu'min—who successfully expelled the Normans of Sicily from North Africa—may have seemed admirable and justifiable. In his preaching, Sibṭ was also particularly devoted to the concept of "commanding right and forbidding wrong" (*al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahī 'an al-munkar*)¹²¹ and he seems to have viewed 'Abd al-Mu'min and his descendants¹²² as some of the rare Muslim rulers who followed those principles. In his brief mention of him in the *Mir'āt*, Sibṭ also praises Ibn Tūmart for commanding right and abnegating the world.¹²³ We can see how 'Abd al-Mu'min's dramatic interrogation of the Jews and Christians, his preservation of the treasury and distribution of its spoils, and his asceticism and daily religious devotions might have suited one of Sibṭ's sermons.

While it remains difficult to identify all of Sibṭ's sources, I propose that, in addition to pro-Muwahḥid Maghribī chronicles, he may have also relied on the written work of, or a personal communication from his contemporary and friend Ibn Ḥamawayh (579–642/1175 or 76–1244), a Damascene traveler.¹²⁴ Ibn Ḥamawayh traveled to the Maghrib during the reign of Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr, spending considerable time at the Muwahḥid court and returning to the Mashriq around 600/1203–4, after which he wrote a well-known account of his travels.¹²⁵ A letter quoted in Sibṭ's biography of Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr also appears in the *Wafayāt al-a'yān*, in which Ibn Khallikān says that he copied it directly from a notebook he saw in Damascus in Ibn Ḥamawayh's own handwriting,¹²⁶ indicating that Sibṭ sometimes drew on Ibn Ḥamawayh's writings.

Ibn Ḥamawayh's link to Sibṭ's report can also be deduced by comparing the *Mir'āt* with the better-known report, first edited and translated by Munk in the nineteenth century, on 'Abd al-Mu'min's abolishment of the *dhimma* from al-Dhahabī's *Tārīkh al-Islām*. In his biography of Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr in the *Tārīkh al-Islām*, al-Dhahabī cites al-Marrākushī on the caliph's suspicion toward the

120 Talmon-Heller, *Islamic piety* 134–5.

121 Ibid. 126 and 128–39.

122 See Sibṭ's aforementioned biographies of Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf and Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr.

123 Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt* 151.

124 Corcos, *The nature* 267, n. 21. While Corcos discusses Ibn Ḥamawayh and his links with Sibṭ at length, surprisingly, he did not consult the *Mir'āt* as a source for the Muwahḥid persecution of the Jews.

125 Ibid.

126 Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt* 446–7; and Ibn Khallikān, *Ibn Khallikān's biographical dictionary* iv, 377–9.

converted Jews. This is followed by a dialogue between Ibn Ḥamawayh and a certain Ibn ‘Aṭīyya, presumably the famous vizier of ‘Abd al-Mu‘min:

Nota bene (fā‘ida)

Tāj al-Dīn b. Ḥamawayh relates that he asked the secretary Ibn ‘Aṭīyya: “Why is it that in this country—that is, the Maghrib—there is not one of the *ahl al-dhimma* or any churches (*kanā’is*) or synagogues (*biya*)?”

He [Ibn ‘Aṭīyya] said: “This dynasty arose out of terror and harshness. The Mahdī used to say to his companions: ‘These veiled ones (*mulaththamīn*) [i.e. the Murabiṭūns] are innovators, anthropomorphists, godless unbelievers whom it is permitted to kill and take prisoner because they are against true belief.’ And once this was done, and they had overcome the [Murabiṭ] sultans after the death of the Mahdī, and ‘Abd al-Mu‘min had conquered Marrakesh, he summoned the Jews and Christians and said: ‘Did not you—or rather, your ancestors—reject the mission of the Prophet, and deny that he was the Messenger promised in your scriptures? And did you not say: When he who is to come comes, it will be to confirm our law and secure our religion?’ They said: ‘Yes.’ He said: ‘Where, then, is your expected one? For, you claimed that he would not take more than five hundred years and five hundred years have already elapsed for our religion and no messenger or warner has come from you. Thus, we cannot let you remain in your unbelief and we have no need of your *jizya*: either [choose] Islam or death.’ Then he set a time period for them in which to lighten their loads [of possessions], sell their property and emigrate¹²⁷ from his [‘Abd al-Mu‘min’s] country. As for most of the Jews, they outwardly embraced Islam while hiding their true beliefs,¹²⁸ thereby keeping their property. As for the Christians, they went to al-Andalus and only a few of them converted to Islam. Churches and monasteries were destroyed in all of the country.”¹²⁹

“Thus, there are no polytheists (*mushrik*) in it [the Maghrib] and no unbeliever (*kāfir*) openly shows his unbelief, at least until after the 600s [i.e., the turn of the seventh century AH] when I left¹³⁰ the Maghrib.”¹³¹

127 The edited *Tārīkh al-Islām* has “*al-nuzūḥ*,” whereas Munk’s manuscript text has “*al-tarrawuḥ*.”

128 The edited *Tārīkh al-Islām* has “*taḥīyyatan*,” whereas Munk’s text has “*baghtatan*.”

129 It is difficult to know where the explanation of Ibn ‘Aṭīyya ends and where the narration by Ibn Ḥamawayh resumes.

130 The edited *Tārīkh al-Islām* has “*infiṣālī*,” whereas Munk’s manuscript has “*intiḡālī*.”

131 al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām* xlii, 222–3. I have used Munk’s French translation as well as Corcos’ English version; Munk, Notice 43–4; and Corcos, The nature 264–5.

The gist of this report is very much the same as the first half of Sibṭ's report, particularly the detail about the supposed promise that the Jews and Christians would convert to Islam by 500 AH and the fact that the *jizya* was abolished. While Corcos accused al-Dhahabī of using the conquest of Marrakesh as an excuse for bringing up "the imaginary decree of 'Abd al-Mu'min" against the *dhimmīs*,¹³² we now see that the *Tārīkh al-Islām* only repeats an account that had already entered the historical narrative by Sibṭ's time, if not before. Indeed, like al-Qiftī's work, the report emphasizes that 'Abd al-Mu'min stipulated a deadline by which unconverted Jews and Christians had to leave his territories and notes that most Jews chose to convert and stay in the Maghrib to protect their wealth, while most Christians chose to leave. Ibn Ḥamawayh was also a contemporary of al-Qiftī, who might have used him as a source.

The main problem of the report in the *Tārīkh al-Islām*, however, is that Ibn 'Aṭīyya, 'Abd al-Mu'min's vizier, was executed by the caliph in 553/1158, before Ibn Ḥamawayh was born.¹³³ To salvage the report, Molénat posits that Ibn Ḥamawayh met a nephew of Ibn 'Aṭīyya by the same name, rather than the famous vizier himself.¹³⁴ I suggest that Ibn 'Aṭīyya may appear in this dialogue because he was the secretary who composed 'Abd al-Mu'min's infamous *Risālat al-fuṣūl*, wherein the caliph exhorted the people to memorize the Muwaḥḥid creed on pain of death. This letter was sent out in slightly varying versions to all the regions conquered by 'Abd al-Mu'min, in order to command good and forbid wrong and give instructions on the proper performance of prayers, paying the *zakāt*, and the strict enforcement of public morality.¹³⁵ Thus, Ibn 'Aṭīyya might have earned himself a reputation for being the authority on 'Abd al-Mu'min's more radical policies and practices. Indeed, if we take the *Risālat al-fuṣūl* into consideration, we can bring together all the essential elements the reports of Sibṭ and the *Tārīkh al-Islām* have in common, including the references to Ibn Ḥamawayh, Ibn 'Aṭīyya, and the Muwaḥḥid reputation for commanding good and forbidding wrong. It is possible that some enterprising historian recycled the story of 'Abd al-Mu'min's persecution of the Jews and, together with the relatively well-known figures of Ibn Ḥamawayh and Ibn 'Aṭīyya, used it to explain the absence of *dhimmīs* in the Maghrib.

However, I do not believe that al-Dhahabī was said historian. In the printed edition of the *Tārīkh al-Islām*, the dialogue between Ibn Ḥamawayh and Ibn 'Aṭīyya is prefaced by the term *fā'ida*, which I have taken to mean "digressional

¹³² Corcos, *The nature* 279.

¹³³ *Ibid.* 266ff.

¹³⁴ Molénat, *Sur le rôle* 397–9.

¹³⁵ Lévi-Provençal, *Lettres* 21–4.

remark” or perhaps “useful example”,¹³⁶ and this implies that it is a citation from another text. Al-Dhahabī’s biographies of the Muwaḥḥidūn indeed tend to be made up of citations from earlier histories. His biography of ‘Abd al-Mu’min, for example, takes up fifteen pages of the printed edition of the *Tārīkh al-Islām* and in it, he cites at least five different sources, many of them Maghribī.¹³⁷ This makes it likely that the dialogue between Ibn Ḥamawayh and Ibn ‘Aṭiyya was either taken from Ibn Ḥamawayh’s own work, from a biography of Ibn Ḥamawayh, or from some other work of history. The fact that the report is out of place in the biography of Ya’qūb al-Manṣūr and rather belongs to the biography of ‘Abd al-Mu’min, implies that it may have been inserted by a copyist, or by a commentator or reader as a marginal note to the main text.¹³⁸ The report is also not included in Ya’qūb al-Manṣūr’s biography in the *Siyar*, which, nevertheless, contains a long passage explicitly attributed to Ibn Ḥamawayh.¹³⁹

Moreover, al-Dhahabī’s reports on ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s persecution of the Jews and Christians is not limited to this one digression. He broaches the subject in his biographies of ‘Abd al-Mu’min in the *Tārīkh al-Islām*¹⁴⁰ and *Siyar*,¹⁴¹ quoting directly from Sibṭ and Ibn Shaddād. As neither of these reports have been examined in the secondary literature on the Muwaḥḥid persecution of the Jews and Christians, we here examine the longer report from the *Tārīkh al-Islām*, and note its most important variants with the *Mir’āt* and the shorter report in the footnotes of the *Siyar*:

[Sibṭ] Ibn al-Jawzī said in the *Mir’āt*: ‘Abd al-Mu’min took possession of Marrakesh. He killed all who opposed him and the populace did not resist. He summoned the protected people (*al-dhimmiyya*)¹⁴² and said: “The Imam al-Mahdī ordered me to instate but one religion amongst

136 Gacek explains that the use of the term *fā’ida* in Arabic manuscripts indicates a “digressional remark,” a “marginal note,” a “gloss,” or the equivalent of *nota bene*; see *The Arabic manuscript* 111.

137 Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām* xxxviii, 252–67.

138 Unfortunately, I have not examined any of the MSS of the *Tārīkh al-Islām*, nor do the editors of the text provide any additional information.

139 Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar* xxi, 311–9. The citation in question is not in the form of a dialogue, but rather begins with the formulation: “*Qāla Tāj al-Dīn ibn Ḥamawayh*” (Tāj al-Dīn b. Ḥamawayh said) and addresses Ya’qūb al-Manṣūr’s valor and intellectual interest; see *ibid.* xxi, 316.

140 Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām* xxxviii, 252–67.

141 Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar* xx, 366–75.

142 The *Mir’āt* has “*al-yahūd wa-l-naṣārā*” rather than “*al-dhimmiyya*.” The editors of the *Siyar* inserted the entire phrase *wa-ahḍara al-yahūd wa-l-naṣārā* in square brackets based on the Hyderabad 1951–2 edition of the *Mir’āt*.

the people—Islam.¹⁴³ I will give you three options: either you convert to Islam or go to the land of war (*dār al-ḥarb*)¹⁴⁴ or you will be killed.” And so a group of them converted to Islam and the others went to the *dār al-ḥarb* and he [‘Abd al-Mu’min] destroyed the churches (*al-kanā’is*) and turned them into mosques and abolished the poll tax (*jizya*). He did this in all of his kingdom. Then he distributed what was in the treasury (*bayt al-māl*) to the people, swept it up and ordered the people to pray in it, according to ‘Alī’s example, in order to show the people that he was not storing money away. Then he elevated the principles of Islam¹⁴⁵ according to perfected politics (*ma’ al-siyāsa al-kāmila*), and he said: “Whosoever desists from prayer for three days, kill him!”¹⁴⁶ He used to pray with the people and read a seventh [of the Quran] each day. He dressed in wool (*ṣūf*)¹⁴⁷ and fasted on Tuesdays and Thursdays. He distributed the spoils of war (*ḥay’*) according to the law and so the people loved him.¹⁴⁸

And ‘Azīz says in the *Kitāb jami’ al-bayān*:¹⁴⁹ He [‘Abd al-Mu’min] would punish his own sons if the need arose. There remained not one polytheist (*mushrik*) in his country, whether Jewish or Christian. There was no church (*kanīsa*) in any part of the country nor any synagogues (*biya’*) because when he first took possession of a Muslim territory he did not suffer the *dhimmīs* but offered them [conversion to] Islam. And whoever was against him was killed.¹⁵⁰ And all the people of his kingdom are Muslims and others do not mingle with them.¹⁵¹

As we can see, al-Dhahabī has tampered very little with Sibṭ or Ibn Shaddād’s reports. Rather, he has acted more like an editor, bringing together Sibṭ’s more

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- 143 The line from the *Mir’āt* about the Jews and Christians promising to convert to Islam after five hundred years has been eliminated here.
- 144 That is, territory not under Muslim rule. Both the *Tārīkh al-Islām* and *Sīyar* have “*bi-dār al-ḥarb*” (lit., abode of war), whereas the *Mir’āt* has “*dār ukhrā*” (i.e., some other land).
- 145 Neither the *Tārīkh al-Islām* nor the *Sīyar* mention ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s institution of the *hudūd*.
- 146 The *Tārīkh al-Islām* eliminates a sentence from the *Mir’āt*: “He upheld order and did not invite abomination but to eradicate it.” The *Sīyar* states briefly: “*wa-azāla al-munkar*” (i.e., he abolished wrong).
- 147 The *Sīyar* states that ‘Abd al-Mu’min wore “*al-ṣūf al-fākhir*” (luxurious wool).
- 148 Al-Dhahabī does not include the final sentence of Sibṭ’s report (i.e., “Thus the people were favorably disposed towards him because he rescinded the reprehensible actions of those who had come before”) in the *Tārīkh al-Islām* or *Sīyar*.
- 149 The citation from Ibn Shaddād is greatly abbreviated in the *Sīyar*.
- 150 Ibn Shaddād also said that whoever converted was safe and that those who wanted to go to Christian territory could do so.
- 151 Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām* xxxviii, 257.

dramatic and detailed account with Ibn Shaddād's more straightforward report, so that the reader can consider both sources of evidence. From Sibṭ's original text, al-Dhahabī might have even deliberately excluded the apocryphal promise of the Jews and Christians to convert to Islam by 500 AH and the association between 'Abd al-Mu'min's enforcement of *ḥudūd* punishments, commanding right and forbidding wrong, and his "perfected politics." Even though he quotes Sibṭ, a later source, he also cites Ibn Shaddād, a near eyewitness to the events, thus finding two independent reports to substantiate the commonly held notion that the Muwaḥḥidūn persecuted the Jews and Christians. This is difficult to reconcile with the accusation that al-Dhahabī copied from his predecessors "while including many mistakes" and "without critical evaluation," let alone "invented tales in order to amuse his readers,"¹⁵² and should command "no more credibility" than the "slovenly" plagiarist al-Qiftī.¹⁵³

Indeed, with reference to al-Dhahabī's biography of a no less controversial figure than the Andalusian Sufi, Muḥyī l-Dīn b. al-'Arabī (d. 638/1240), Knysh observes that al-Dhahabī presents a "much more nuanced portrait" of Ibn 'Arabī than other biographers of the famous mystic.¹⁵⁴ Knysh goes on to explain: "To demonstrate his objectivity, al-Dhahabī thoroughly collected all the opinions of Ibn 'Arabī he could find in earlier biographical dictionaries, whereupon he reproduced them chronologically, thoroughly avoiding any critical comments."¹⁵⁵ This is also in keeping with al-Dhahabī's biography of Ibn Taymiyya, whom he criticized and depicted as realistically as possible, despite his affection for him. As Little demonstrated, al-Dhahabī's "remarks indicate that he was objective, rather than envious, fed up and frustrated, rather than malicious."¹⁵⁶ Much of al-Dhahabī's scholarly detachment and skill as a historian is also at work in his brief account of the Muwaḥḥid persecution of the Jews and Christians.

5 Concluding Remarks

Having compared Mashriqī historians to each other as well as to some Jewish and Christian sources, it is difficult to accuse Mashriqī historians of having exaggerated or even invented 'Abd al-Mu'min's persecution of *dhimmīs*. Multiple

¹⁵² Corcos, *The nature* 266, n. 20.

¹⁵³ Davidson, *Moses Maimonides* 17–9.

¹⁵⁴ Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabi* 114.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 115.

¹⁵⁶ Little, *Did Ibn Taymiyya* 105.

independent eyewitness (or near-eyewitness) accounts—Solomon ha-Kohen, Ibn Shaddād, al-Marrākushī, probably Ibn Ḥamawayh—give us remarkably similar accounts of events and Muwaḥḥid policies. Far from “scattered and sometimes contradictory references to conversion decrees and their impact,”¹⁵⁷ historians have made it clear that ‘Abd al-Mu’min was intractable on the subject of Jews and Christians—not to mention religious *mœurs* in his lands in general—and this prompted many to flee Muwaḥḥid lands, while others were killed and the Jews, for the most part, decided to stay and hide their true beliefs. Even once the first heady decades of the Muwaḥḥid revolution were over, the unforeseen repercussions of the forced conversion of the Jews—such as their increase in wealth and status—was a source of jealousy and anxiety for ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s grandson Ya’qūb al-Manṣūr.

Further evidence of the long-lasting effects of the Muwaḥḥid revolution can be gleaned from the *Rawḍ al-qirtās* of the post-Muwaḥḥid historian Ibn Abī Zar‘ (d. 726/1340–1). He mentions an incident from the reign of the ninth Muwaḥḥid caliph, al-Ma’mūn (r. 625–30/1227–32), which would seem to confirm that the Muwaḥḥidūn continued to be associated with the suppression of Jews and Christians in the Maghribī historical memory.¹⁵⁸ In the midst of a brutal internecine conflict for the caliphate, al-Ma’mūn sought to abolish Muwaḥḥid doctrine, denouncing Ibn Tūmart as a false Mahdī and executing many prominent shaykhs in the Muwaḥḥid religious hierarchy. He also forged an alliance with the king of Castile, agreeing to bring hundreds of Christian mercenaries to Marrakesh. Ibn Abī Zar‘ relates that during a raid on Marrakesh, al-Ma’mūn’s great rival for the caliphate, his nephew Yaḥyā (d. 633/1236), destroyed the church built for the Castilian mercenaries and also killed a large number of Jews.¹⁵⁹ Whatever objections we might raise with regard to the historicity of the report, it nevertheless seems to imply that the attempt to restore the Muwaḥḥid creed to the realm went hand in hand with the destruction of Christian holy places and the killing of *dhimmīs*.¹⁶⁰

We are nevertheless left with the question of why, on the whole, the fate of the Jews and Christians during the Muwaḥḥid period was documented by Mashriqī, but not Maghribī historians. Fricaud rightly argues that the texts of late-Muwaḥḥid and post-Muwaḥḥid historians suffer from “de-Almohadization,” that is, they make a concerted effort to downplay the radical

157 Bennison and Gallego, Religious minorities 147.

158 I owe this reference to Corcos, The Jews 287. Yet, Corcos seems to have excluded this incident from The nature 259–85.

159 Ibn Abī Zar‘, *Rawḍ* 185. On these incidents, see also Huici Miranda, *Historia política* ii, 476–8.

160 For a different interpretation of this incident, see Cherif, *Encore* 83.

religious innovations of the Muwaḥḥidūn.¹⁶¹ As al-Qiftī reminds us, the forced conversion of *dhimmīs* was one such innovation—as was the killing of thousands of believing Mālikīs that so outraged Ibn Taymiyya. We should stress that Muwaḥḥid-era Maghribī sources also tended to downplay or justify the killing of non-Muwaḥḥid Muslims. Hence, al-Baydhaq simply lists the dissenting Muwaḥḥid tribes slaughtered by ‘Abd al-Mu’min, but does not say much more about it,¹⁶² Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Ṣalāt demonizes the Muwaḥḥidūn’s Muslim rivals in al-Andalus,¹⁶³ and the pro-Muwaḥḥid historian Ibn al-Qaṭṭān deploys a litany of bloody, anti-anthropomorphist *ḥadīths* from Ibn Tūmart’s work to justify the Muwaḥḥidūn’s slaughter of their Murābiṭ enemies.¹⁶⁴ From the distant Mashriq, however, Ibn al-Athīr had no qualms about reminding his readers that the great conqueror ‘Abd al-Mu’min “shed much blood of Muslims for minor faults.”

Yet, Mashriqī historians were not, on the whole, overly polemical. After all, Sibṭ’s report is the source for al-Dhahabī and Ibn Taghrī Birdī and Sibṭ approved ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s politics. Most Mashriqī historians were not interested in the moral dimensions of ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s actions, but rather relate the abolishment of the *dhimma* as yet one more fact of Muwaḥḥid history. If anything, they treat the idea that there are absolutely no Jews or Christians or synagogues or churches in western Muslim lands as a strange fact about the Maghrib (something belonging to the category of *‘ajā’ib*) and something so foreign from their own experience that they need to call on the authority of those who have been to the west to prove that it is true.

In the end, one reason for the silence of Maghribī historians on ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s oppression of the Jews and Christians may simply be that this information did not enter the Maghribī historical narrative and take root. Had Ibn Shaddād’s initial report on the fate of the Jews and Christians of Tunis not made its way into some of the important Mashriqī chronicles, catching the interest of historians, it may not have come down to us today. As we see, it was through a process of borrowing and copying that the Muwaḥḥid abolishment of the *dhimma* found its way into some of the great Mamlūk histories, waiting to lend its support to the furtive laments of a few Jewish travelers and poets. Thus, rather than condemn the likes of al-Dhahabī for the literary touches that creep into his history or for his lack of originality, we should praise him for his

161 Fricaud, *Les talaba* 331–3.

162 Al-Baydhaq, *Les mémoires* 181–5.

163 Jones, “The Christian companion” 793–829.

164 I owe this reference to Bennison, Almohad *tawḥīd* 208–9. See also Ibn al-Qaṭṭān, *Naẓm* 94–100.

hard work of compilation, preservation, and selection, his rigor and even his objectivity.

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Al-Maqrīzī and His *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr al-muqaffā li-Miṣr*

Part 1: an Inquiry into the History of the Work

Frédéric Bauden

1 Introduction¹

In his analysis of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's reign, Donald P. Little adduced that the richness of Mamlūk sources "is a mixed blessing."² Students of the Mamlūk period know that, in contrast to previous periods in Islamic history, there is no lack of historical literary sources. What can be considered at times a plethora of sources poses several issues, the most central of which is their originality and reliability. Little's analysis offered an approach to Mamlūk historical sources, namely, a way to sort them out in order to understand their inter-relationships, with the ultimate goal of establishing their individual importance. As he stressed in the late 1960s, many Mamlūk sources were as yet unpublished, and thus represented a challenge for historians of the period, who did not enjoy the ease with which we are now able to consult digital color reproductions of manuscripts online. The situation he faced compelled him to focus his attention on a narrow group of sources, printed or unpublished. Among those he set aside was al-Maqrīzī's (766–845/1364–1442) *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr al-muqaffā li-Miṣr* (henceforth, *al-Muqaffā*), a multi-volume biographical dictionary of Egyptians—broadly speaking—who died before the beginning of the decade

¹ Part of this article was written as part of the *Ex(-)Libris ex Oriente* (ELEO) project funded by the Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique—FNRS (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, Belgium) and the *Bibliotheca Maqriziana* (BiMa) project funded by the University of Liège. The research on which this study is largely based was carried out in May 2003 thanks to a fellowship granted by the Scaliger Institute at the University of Leiden. The preliminary results were presented in a lecture read there on November 27, 2003. The study is published in two parts, this one being the first. The second part, dealing with the history of the text and its copies after al-Maqrīzī's demise will appear in *Quaderni di Studi Arabi*. I am grateful to Sami Massoud, the editor of this volume, and Antonella Gheretti for their thorough reading of a draft of this essay. Thanks to their comments, I was able to revise some of my assertions. It goes without saying that I am solely responsible for any mistakes that may still be identified by the reader.

² Little, *An introduction* 1.

in which al-Maqrīzī was born (that is, 760/1359).³ The work is only preserved in a handful of manuscripts. Although these were known to Orientalists from the mid-nineteenth century, it is fair to say they attracted little attention.

In 1837, the Frenchman Étienne Quatremère (1782–1857) was the first to reveal the presence of a holograph volume of *al-Muqaffā* in the holdings of the National Library in Paris (MS Ar. 2144).⁴ This revelation allowed the young Dutchman, Reinhart Pieter Anne Dozy (1820–83) to identify three additional holograph⁵ volumes in the Leiden University collections (MSS Or. 1366a, 1366c, 3075), a discovery he shared with the scholarly community in 1847.⁶ Ten years later, the Italian Michele Amari, who worked at the National Library in Paris between 1843 and 1848 while in exile there, published a selection of biographies of Sicilians, which he found discussed in *al-Muqaffā*.⁷ Strangely, the existence of the text went unnoticed for more than a century, until the Tunisian scholar Muḥammad al-Yaʿlāwī (1929–2015) published a selection of biographies from the Fāṭimid period (1987).⁸ This publication revived interest in *al-Muqaffā* and, in 1990, as part of an onomastic project, two Spanish scholars analyzed the list of biographies of Andalusians they could identify in this work.⁹ Meanwhile, al-Yaʿlāwī worked on the *editio princeps* of the four above-mentioned holograph volumes and one apograph volume¹⁰ that had surfaced in Istanbul (MS Pertev Paşa 496).¹¹ When he visited Leiden, al-Yaʿlāwī was informed that an additional, so far unknown, holograph volume had been sold by a famous London auction house in 1978 and purchased by the curator of Oriental manuscripts at the University of Leiden, Jan Just Witkam. Unfortunately, because of the poor state of its conservation, the manuscript (MS Or. 14533) remained

3 Al-Maqrīzī dedicated another biographical dictionary to his contemporaries (but not necessarily Egyptians), specifically, those who died or were born after 760/1359. The work is entitled *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda fī tarājīm al-aʿyān al-muʿfida*.

4 Quatremère, *Histoire* i, xj.

5 A holograph volume is a volume that is wholly in the author's handwriting. See Gacek, *A vademecum* 14–5.

6 Dozy, *Découverte* 14 (where he explains that in order to confirm his hypothesis he sent a facsimile of a few lines from one of the three Leiden manuscripts to the French Orientalist Charles Defrémery (1822–83) who, in return, validated that it was al-Maqrīzī's handwriting).

7 Amari, *Biblioteca arabo-sicula* 661–9. The biographies were later translated into Italian: Amari, *Biblioteca arabo-sicula, versione italiana* ii, 572–87.

8 Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaffā l-kabīr: Tarājīm maghribīyya wa-mashriqīyya*.

9 Fierro and Lucini, *Biografías de Andalusies*.

10 An apograph is a copy made by a copyist on the basis of the holograph.

11 Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaffā* (1991 ed.). It was soon followed by the publication of Ibn Taymiyya's biography in *al-Muqaffā* by another editor: al-Maqrīzī, *Tarjamat shaykh al-islām Ibn Taymiyya*.

unusable for several years.¹² It soon became clear that the material in this new volume was, for the most part, already covered by the Istanbul apograph. Yet, in 2006, al-Yaʿlāwī published an updated and corrected edition, one that included the restored and accessible holograph volume purchased by Leiden in 1978.¹³

With the exception of the specialists of the Fāṭimid period, who appreciate its value,¹⁴ and notwithstanding the fact that *al-Muqaffā* has been available in a printed edition for almost thirty years, it is rarely quoted in the modern literature. In fact, until I pointed out its existence, no one noticed that it contains a detailed biography of the great lettrist¹⁵ al-Būnī (d. after 622/1225), on whose life we have only a limited number of sources, and these provide few details.¹⁶ My contribution here aims to bring *al-Muqaffā* into the limelight by providing a holistic analysis of its history in the broadest sense, i.e., from its inception up to its distribution, and in particular, al-Maqrīzī's intention in composing such a biographical dictionary and its place in the schedule of his work.¹⁷ These preserved manuscripts of *al-Muqaffā* (Leiden, MSS Or. 1366a, 1366c, 3075, 14533; Paris, MS Ar. 2144; Istanbul, MS Pertev Paşa 496) are key to such an analysis and their story provides us with a perfect illustration of the interconnection of the work of scholars across time and space.¹⁸

2 The Remnants of a Biographical Dictionary

According to Ibn Taghrī Birdī (d. 874/1470), al-Maqrīzī disclosed to him: "If this *History* were to be completed on the basis of [the material] that I have selected,

¹² For the restoration, see Keus and Clements, *The Maqrīzī* in a better state.

¹³ Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaffā* (2006 ed.). Since then two new editions have been published: one in Beirut in 2010 under the title *Tārīkh al-Maqrīzī l-kabīr al-musammā l-Muqaffā l-kabīr* (in fact, this is an exact reproduction of the 1991 edition published by al-Yaʿlāwī); and a second one in Hyderabad (2000–10), by a group of scholars. I became aware of the existence of the latter thanks to the catalogue of the printing press (information provided by Tariq Sabra whom I thank), but I was unable to see it or even find a copy in online catalogs of libraries around the world (it may be that this edition never appeared on the market). Thus, it is impossible for me to say if the editors simply reproduced al-Yaʿlāwī's 1991 edition or if they prepared a new edition based on the same manuscripts.

¹⁴ See Walker, *Exploring an Islamic empire* 165 ("its importance for the Fatimid history is considerable when and where the biographies in it cover appropriate figures").

¹⁵ I.e., a specialist in the science of letters.

¹⁶ See Gardiner, *Forbidden knowledge* 86, n. 14.

¹⁷ This study builds on and revises three former studies: Zaydān, *Manhaj al-Maqrīzī*; Witkam, *Les Autographes*; Witkam, *Reflections*.

¹⁸ Their story is the subject of the second part of this chapter.

it would exceed eighty volumes.”¹⁹ This testimony is singularly significant, not least because Ibn Taghrī Birdī belonged to the small circle of younger scholars who frequented al-Maqrīzī at the very end of his life.²⁰ A clear expression of dissatisfaction also emanates from this statement: contrary to his intentions, the work remained unfinished, even though, apparently, he had collected enough material. Al-Biqāʿī (d. 885/1480), a member of the same circle of junior scholars who attended al-Maqrīzī’s house when he was in his late seventies,²¹ transmitted a somewhat different account regarding the number of projected volumes: “If he were in a suitable state [to complete it], it would not have been fewer than one hundred large volumes.”²² Whatever the case may be, the issue here is not how many volumes *al-Muqaffā* would have been composed of, if al-Maqrīzī had brought it to completion according to his wish and the material he had collected, rather it is how many volumes it was at the time of al-Maqrīzī’s death. This is the work that was part of his output and, as such, became available to other scholars after his demise. Here again, the testimonies of his contemporaries prove essential. According to al-Biqāʿī, it consisted of sixteen volumes²³ and this number is confirmed by another young scholar who studied with al-Maqrīzī in his late years, the Meccan historian Ibn Fahd (d. 885/1480).²⁴ For al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497), who could not consult *al-Muqaffā* before at least the 850s/1450s, it consisted of at least fifteen volumes.²⁵ His

- 19 Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Manhal al-ṣāfi* i, 419 (dhakara li raḥimahu llāh: qāla: law kamula hādha l-tārikh ‘alā mā akhtāruhu la-jāwaza l-thamānīn mujallad). Al-Sakhāwī repeated the statement, borrowing it from Ibn Taghrī Birdī, in a nonverbatim quote in which he opted for the indirect discourse: “He said, more or less in these terms, that if he had attended to it, it would have come to eighty [volumes]” (qāla innahu law tawajjaha lahu la-jā’a fi thamānīn aw kamā qāla). Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Iʿlān* 266 = trans. 478.
- 20 Ibn Taghrī Birdī appears in a certificate of audition for the reading of a text in which al-Maqrīzī served as the master (*musmiʿ*); the session took place at his house three weeks before his death. See Bauden, *al-Maqrīzī’s collection*, chapter 1.
- 21 Al-Biqāʿī attended a session in which a text was read aloud to al-Maqrīzī in his house in 841/1438. See *ibid.*
- 22 Al-Biqāʿī, *Unwān al-zamān* i, 110 (qāla: wa-mā yaqṣur in [not *an* as in the edition] yaḥmil [in the sense ‘to be ready for’ attested by Steingass] ‘an miʾat mujallad kibār).
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 Ibn Fahd, *Muʿjam* 66. Ibn Fahd took part in reading sessions of al-Maqrīzī’s biography of the Prophet (*Imtāʾ al-asmāʾ*) in the author’s presence in 834/1431 and 839/1436, both times in Mecca; he also attended a session for another text read aloud to al-Maqrīzī in the latter’s house in Cairo in 838/1434. See Bauden, *al-Maqrīzī’s collection*, chapters 1 and 3.
- 25 Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Iʿlān* 266 = trans. 468 (fi khamisa ‘ashar mujallad fa-akthar, “in fifteen volumes and even more”). I have adapted Rosenthal’s translation slightly, for the sake of accuracy. Al-Sakhāwī was born in 830/1427; thus, he was only fifteen years old when al-Maqrīzī passed away and too young to have been granted access to his manuscripts. Furthermore, thanks to his note of consultation, we know that he only had access to

imprecision, in comparison with the statements of al-Biqā'ī and Ibn Fahd, may be due to the physical state of the work at al-Maqrīzī's death and the time that had elapsed until al-Sakhāwī was authorized to have access to it.

To be precise, another contemporary witness who belonged to that circle of juniorscholars regularly visiting the master at home, al-Khayḍarī (d. 894/1489),²⁶ provides us with a detail regarding the material state of these volumes. In Sha'bān 844/late December 1440–January 1441, a year before al-Maqrīzī's death, he perused and took advantage of the volumes of *al-Muqaffā*, as his reading notes (i.e., notes where he stated that he consulted al-Maqrīzī's manuscripts of *al-Muqaffā*) attest,²⁷ and he stresses, in two cases,²⁸ that he consulted several bunches of unbound quires (*rizam*), which were still identifiable as volumes, given that his notes of consultation are repeated in different manuscripts (Or. 14533, Ar. 2144). We have every reason to believe that this may have been the case for the remainder of *al-Muqaffā*, as it was still a work in progress when al-Maqrīzī died. Nevertheless, after al-Maqrīzī's death, the volumes were eventually bound. Some of the ones that have been preserved show a leaf where the design of the leather envelope flap left an impression (see fig. 3.1).²⁹ The mark corresponds to a design composed of what must have been an eight-pointed star in a circle placed in the middle of the flap with the upper and lower spaces filled with a geometric design. The decoration was certainly blind (i.e., without gold) and gilt tooled on leather. The color of the leather transferred onto the paper of the leaf where the flap was placed when the binding was closed. The eight-pointed star was a popular design in the Mamlūk period. It might indicate that the volumes were in fact bound in the second part of the ninth/fifteenth century.³⁰ At that time, before the binding took place, the volumes might have been reorganized into fewer volumes, a process facilitated by collecting the volumes into bunches of unbound quires. An indication that such a reorganization indeed took place can be found in another testimony

al-Maqrīzī's holograph manuscript of *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda* in 855/1451, when he was twenty-four years old. This date may also correspond to the time he managed to consult al-Maqrīzī's other manuscripts. For more details, see part 2 of this essay.

26 On him, see part 2 of this essay.

27 For his marks of consultation, see part 2 of this essay.

28 Or. 14533, fol. 170b and Ar. 2144, fol. 41b.

29 The transfer was caused by moisture. The same design appears in MSS Or. 1366c (fol. 31b) and Or. 14533 (fol. 53b). Both volumes are now in Leiden; they reached the repository at different periods, through two different itineraries. For these itineraries, see part 2 of this essay.

30 Ohta, *Covering the book* 112–4 (flaps), 141–2 (star pattern) and 120 (fig. 4.17); Weisweiler, *Der islamische Bucheinband* 27–30 (flaps) and 57–8 (star as a design for flaps); Scheper, *The technique*.

provided by a scholar who was granted access to *al-Muqaffā* by its owner at the time. This scholar, al-Dāʿūdī (d. 945/1539),³¹ wanted to peruse *al-Muqaffā* in order to extract material for his biographical dictionary of exegetes (*Ṭabaqāt al-mufasssīrīn*),³² a work that he made a fair copy of in 941/1534–5. At the end of the text, he mentions the sources on which he relied, among which was al-Maqrīzī's biographical dictionary, *al-Muqaffā*. He says that it consisted of thirteen large volumes in the author's hand.³³ Thus, the number of volumes had already decreased from sixteen to thirteen. It is difficult to say if this reduction corresponded to a loss of text: al-Dāʿūdī quotes *al-Muqaffā* for biographies covering the letters *alif*, *ʿayn*, and *mīm* only.³⁴ If such a loss occurred, it must have taken place between the third quarter of the ninth/fifteenth century and the beginning of the tenth/sixteenth century because al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), who was active as a scholar from the 860s/1450s–60s, quoted *al-Muqaffā* for biographies starting with the letters *alif*, *ṣīn*, *ṣād*, *ʿayn*, *mīm*, *nūn*, and *hāʾ*, meaning that he probably accessed almost the whole text, if not all of it.³⁵

In the mid-tenth/sixteenth century, the volumes progressively lost their bindings and another reorganization of the quires took place between one volume and the other. MS Or. 1366a is evidence of this process. Fol. 31a bears the mark left by the envelope flap of the original binding as well as two ownership notes, respectively datable to the end of the ninth/fifteenth century and the beginning of the tenth/sixteenth century, and a note of consultation (specifically, by al-Dāʿūdī) datable to the beginning of the tenth/sixteenth century. Such notes are usually added at the beginning of the manuscript, ideally on the title page, or, if that is missing, on the first leaf, as in the case here. The envelope flap impression and these notes confirm that the volume initially started with what is now fol. 31a. The thirty leaves that precede it thus come from other parts of *al-Muqaffā* as well as from another of his works, as confirmed by their contents. The biographies found on fols. 6a–30b start with the letters *alif* (fols. 6a–16b: Ibrāhīms and Aḥmads), *kāf* (fols. 17a–18b), *lām* (fols. 19a–20b: Lu'lu's), and *mīm* (fols. 21a–30b: Mājids, Mālik, Muqbil, Malika), while the remainder of the volume, which consists of 288 folios, only contains Muḥammads. On the other hand, fols. 1a–4b correspond to a treatise of traditions collected by

31 On him and his marks of consultation, see part 2 of this essay.

32 Contrary to what the title might suggest, the dictionary is organized alphabetically, not according to generations (*ṭabaqāt*).

33 Al-Dāʿūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufasssīrīn* ii, 386 (wa-qad ṭālaʿtu ʿalā ḥādha l-kitāb ... wa-min al-Muqaffā lil-Maqrīzī bi-khaṭṭihi ṭhalātha ʿashar mujallad kibār).

34 Note that if the remaining volumes still covered the whole alphabet, al-Dāʿūdī would have quoted biographies starting with other than these three letters.

35 On him and his use of *al-Muqaffā*, see part 2 of this essay.



FIGURE 3.1 Impression left by the leather envelope flap (left: MS Or. 1366c, fol. 31b; right: MS Or. 14533, fol. 53b)

a certain Ibn Quṭrāl (d. 710/1310) and copied by al-Maqrīzī, who had a license of transmission for this text.³⁶ This treatise was originally the second text in al-Maqrīzī's collection of opuscles, also preserved in Leiden (MS Or. 560), as corroborated by a list of contents written on the first leaf at the beginning of the tenth/sixteenth century by its owner at that time. We can deduce, from the fact that this opuscle is now found at the opening of MS Or. 1366a together with leaves (fols. 6a–30b) stemming from other volumes of *al-Muqaffā*, that, first, the volumes of *al-Muqaffā* lost their bindings and were reorganized; second, that the person who owned the collection of opuscles also possessed the volumes of *al-Muqaffā*. Moreover, there is evidence that that owner also possessed the volumes of al-Maqrīzī's *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda*,³⁷ we know this because parts of *al-Muqaffā* are also found in the preserved section of the holograph of *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda* (Gotha, MS Or. A1771) and vice versa. In the latter, we find, at the end of the manuscript, biographies starting with *ʿayn*; these are unrelated to the *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda*, which was written about biographies of al-Maqrīzī's contemporaries who died after the beginning of the decade in which he was born, i.e., 760/1359.³⁸ By contrast, in some manuscripts of *al-Muqaffā*, we can now find certain biographies that should be in *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda*, because the biographees died well after the chronological limit set by al-Maqrīzī for *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda*. This is the case for several biographies starting with the letter *khāʾ* at the end of MS Or. 14533 (fols. 548a–550b). The last of these (fols. 549a–550b) regards a contemporary Indian ruler who was still living in 839/1434 and who never visited Egypt, a *sine qua non* condition to appear in *al-Muqaffā*.³⁹ This biography, and the others that precede it, can indeed be found in the only copy of *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda* that was presumably made from the autograph and is supposedly complete.⁴⁰ Given that

36 See Bauden, *al-Maqrīzī's collection*, chapter 5, no. 23.

37 On that work, see al-Jalīlī's introduction in the first volume of al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda*.

38 These thirty biographies were identified by the editor of *al-Muqaffā* as being part of it and were added to the 1991 edition, 8:697–756, and to the 2006 edition, 4:361–93.

39 See below, section 4.

40 The manuscript is in two volumes, each copied by a different scribe, two months apart, in 878/1474. For the copyists' colophon, see al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda* i, 54 and 56. This copy was owned by the Jalīlī family in Mosul. Its present whereabouts are unknown. It is difficult to ascertain if the text as represented by the holograph was still complete when the copy was made. At least it reproduces the text as it stood at the time of this copy. The biography of this Indian ruler can be found in al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda* ii, 57–61 (no. 444). Even though it should not be found in *al-Muqaffā*, al-Yaʿlāwī included it in his revised edition of 2006. See al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaffā* (2006 ed.) iii, 432–4 (no. 1373/2), particularly 434 (n. 1): tanqaṭīʿ al-tarjama hunā wa-tatawāṣal fī *Durar al-ʿuqūd* bi-idāfa

TABLE 3.1 List of holograph volumes of *al-Muqaffā*

City	Library	Shelf mark	No. of leaves
Leiden	Universiteitsbibliotheek	Or. 1366a	288
Leiden	Universiteitsbibliotheek	Or. 1366c	252
Leiden	Universiteitsbibliotheek	Or. 3075	227
Leiden	Universiteitsbibliotheek	Or. 14533	550
Paris	Bibliothèque nationale de France	Ar. 2144	260

that copy of *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda* was completed in 878/1474, we can infer that the material from the two texts was mixed after that date.⁴¹

Of the original sixteen unbound volumes of the holograph, only a portion has been preserved in five manuscripts (see table 3.1), which total 1,577 leaves.⁴²

yasīra wa-tarjamatuhu laysat min sharṭ *al-Muqaffā* in lam tudhkar lahu šila bi-Miṣr fa-lā tadrī sabab idrājiḥā fī makhṭūṭa mulḥaqa bi-l-*Muqaffā*. It is important to stress that the last leaf (fol. 550b), where the biography of the Indian ruler stops, has a catchword in a different handwriting than al-Maqrīzī's that gives the name of the following biography (Khalaf b. Ḥasan). This is precisely the biography that follows in *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda* ii, 61–2 (no. 445), a further proof that material from these two works was mixed up at a later date.

41 Some volumes of *al-Muqaffā* still contain indications penned by later owners giving the number of the volume at that time: MS Or. 14533 (Leiden), fol. 266a:

الجزو الثاني من تاريخ المقرئ بخطه:

MS Ar. 2144 (Paris), fol. 226b:

آخر الجزء السادس.

However, it is impossible to know when these descriptive notes were added to the manuscripts and, consequently, to date the said division in volumes.

42 In this respect, note three additional manuscripts that are related, in one way or another, to *al-Muqaffā*:

- MS Or. 935 (Cambridge) was copied in the nineteenth century by M.J. de Goeje and presented to Cambridge University Library by William Wright's widow. It consists of 12 leaves, copied on one side only (recto); it corresponds to al-Mubarrad's biography (*al-Muqaffā*, 1991 ed., vii, 466–81; 2006 ed., vii, 250–8, no. 3564). See Browne, *Supplementary hand-list* 204, no. 1238. Wright planned to use this biography for the introduction to his edition of al-Mubarrad's *al-Kāmil* (Leipzig, 1864–92), an introduction that he never completed. See al-Mubarrad, *al-Kāmil* ii, 111 (de Goeje, the editor of that volume, explains that he found his own copy of that biography from *al-Muqaffā* among Wright's papers).
- MS Or. 14534 (Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek), composed of a bifolio consisting of the title page of *al-Ṭālīʿ al-saʿīd al-jāmiʿ li-asmāʾ al-fuḍalāʾ wa-l-ruwāt bi-aʿlā l-Ṣaʿīd* by al-Udḡuwi (d. 748/1347), was found in MS Or. 14533. On fol. 1a, the author's biography

The issue at hand is to understand what number of the sixteen original volumes these five manuscripts contain, so that we might conclude the total size of the work that al-Maqrīzī composed and thereby determine what has been lost. In 1994, Jan Just Witkam approached this issue by comparing the number of biographies starting with one of the letters covered in those five volumes with those appearing in a biographical dictionary written by al-Maqrīzī's contemporary, Ibn Ḥajar (d. 852/1449), in his *al-Durar al-kāmina*.⁴³ The result can only be a rough calculation, as Witkam himself recognized;⁴⁴ that is, in the said biographical dictionary these biographies would consist of 1,303 pages from a total of 2,095, i.e., 62 percent, or 3,325 biographies from a total of 5,204, i.e., 64 percent. On that basis, Witkam concluded that the five volumes would represent 9.6 volumes of the sixteen originals, each original volume being composed of 164.5 leaves (thus sixteen volumes = 2,632 leaves).⁴⁵ Another method to tackle this issue involves a consideration of the actual size of the five volumes. Even though these went through some reorganization, as we have just seen, the average number of leaves per volume is 257.⁴⁶ If we adopt that average for each of the original volumes, it gives us $16 \times 257 = 4,112$ leaves. In such

copied from *al-Muqaffā* appears; this tallies with the entry found in the printed version (1991 ed., iii, 36, no. 1072; 2006 ed., iii, 23, no. 1072).

- According to de Slane, *Catalogue* 327, MS Ar. 1790 (Ibn Taghrī Birdī's holograph copy of *al-Kawākib al-bāhira*, an abridgement of his *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*) contains a biography in al-Maqrīzī's handwriting (fol. 3) that might come from one of *al-Muqaffā*'s holograph volumes (at present, it is mutilated with two large portions of paper missing). First, the handwriting is not al-Maqrīzī's. Second, it is not a biography: the first line corresponds to a personal name, but the text that follows relates to the value of letters in a given name and the calculation that can be made thereof.

43 Witkam does not say which edition he used for the comparison, but we can assume that it was the 1966–7 Cairene edition in five volumes published by Muḥammad Sayyid Jād al-Ḥaqq, as this was the only one available at the time Witkam published his article.

44 The system adopted for the comparison is not completely accurate because Witkam thought all the biographies that start with a specific letter are preserved in the volumes of *al-Muqaffā*, while this is not the case. For instance, for the letter *mīm*, the biographees are mainly Muḥammads. On the other hand, Ibn Ḥajar's *al-Durar al-kāmina* is a biographical dictionary of men who died in the eighth/fourteenth century, while *al-Muqaffā* covers the whole Islamic period including some biographies of persons from the pre-Islamic period.

45 Witkam, *Les Autographes* 96.

46 In this calculation, the thirty leaves at the beginning of Or. 1366a and the three at the end of Or. 14533 identified as stemming from some of al-Maqrīzī's other works (*Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda* and collection of opuscles) were subtracted from the total. Moreover, MS Or. 14533, now composed of 550 leaves, cannot correspond to one volume, but more likely corresponds to two, as proven by the fact that a later owner indicated on fol. 266a that what was then the second volume (الجزو الثاني من تاريخ المقرئ بخطه) began. The total thus gives 1,543 leaves divided by six (the number of original volumes). Let us stress that

a case, the preserved portion (1,543 leaves) would represent 37 percent of the original sixteen volumes, versus the 62 percent calculated by Witkam.

The issue of the portion of text that has been lost can also be approached from the perspective of the number of biographies still extant. For this approach, we must consider the apograph that was based on the holograph and the two editions published by al-Yaʿlāwī. MS Pertev Paşa 496 (Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi) is composed of 448 leaves covering the beginning of *al-Muqaffā*, from *alif* to *khāʾ* inclusively.⁴⁷ The anonymous scribe did not date his copy but the manuscript can be dated to the second half of the ninth/fifteenth century; we know this because of the kind of paper he used.⁴⁸ We can easily confirm that he made his copy from the holograph because he clearly identified the autograph additions scribbled by al-Maqrīzī's colleague and friend, Ibn Ḥajar, who perused the text after al-Maqrīzī's death:⁴⁹ he wrote, in the margin, the expression *hādhihi l-tarjama li-Ibn Ḥajar* or the like. This apograph also indicates that the holograph volumes of *al-Muqaffā* had not yet been mixed with material from al-Maqrīzī's other works (his collection of opuscles and *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda*), given that the few biographies identified at the end of MS Or. 14533 (fols. 548a–550b) as stemming from *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda* are absent from this apograph. Nevertheless, we know from the quantity of the text covered by his copy that the copyist did not respect the original division into volumes.⁵⁰ We can also understand that he probably made a full copy of the sixteen volumes, because at the end of the last biography (fol. 448b), on the same line, he added the following inscription: *yatlū baʿdahu ḥarfū l-dāl* (the letter *dāl* follows after this [in the next volume]).⁵¹ This letter, as well as the following ones up to *ṭāʾ*, are now completely missing in the

257 leaves would tally with al-Dāʿudī's description quoted above in n. 32 (*thalātha ʿashar mujallad kibār*, "thirteen thick volumes").

47 For the history of this volume, see part 2 of this essay.

48 It is a laid Oriental paper with chain lines clustered in threes and parallel to the spine. According to Humbert, *Papiers non filigranés* 21 (type d), in the collections of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the latest dated manuscript in which she identified this type is from 852/1448–9.

49 On these additions, see part 2 of this essay.

50 It corresponds to the biographies now contained in MS Or. 14533 (550 leaves), and the letter *khāʾ* that is now lost.

51 It is likely that the other volumes of this copy have not been identified because the copyist left the title page blank and it is a later owner who correctly identified the work. The other volumes of this copy might still have blank title pages, making their identification more complicated.

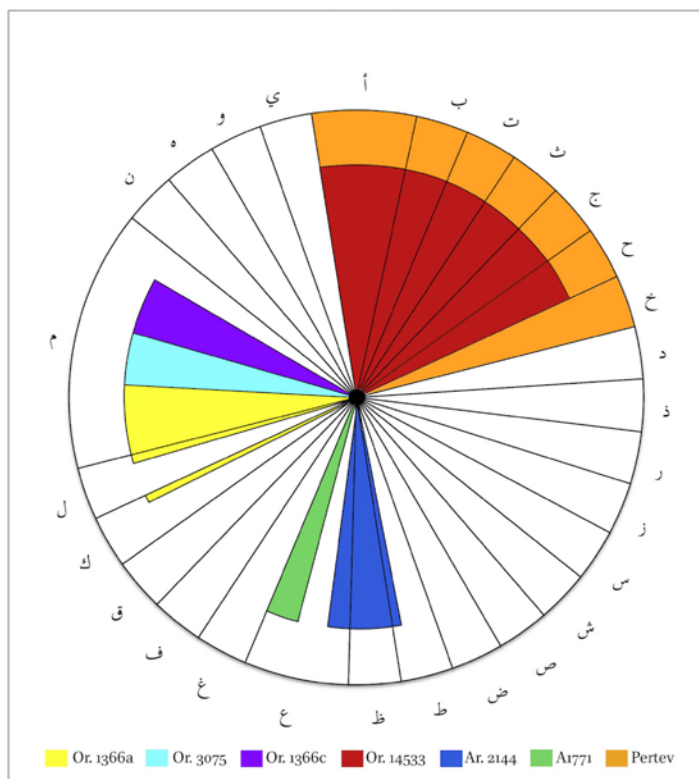


FIGURE 3.2 Diagram of the letters covered by each volume

holograph volumes.⁵² The preceding diagram (see fig. 3.2) helps us determine what part of the original text is still extant in the various manuscripts.⁵³

For the 2006 edition of *al-Muqaffā*, al-Ya'lāwī was finally able to take MS Or. 14533 into consideration.⁵⁴ Since he had worked on the basis of the apograph

⁵² In addition to all the letters that follow *mīm*.

⁵³ The inner circle represents al-Maqrīzī's holograph volumes of *al-Muqaffā* or of *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda* where some biographies from *al-Muqaffā* are now found, while the outer circle corresponds to the apograph. This diagram is not accurate in terms of the size attributed to each letter, as we ignore the quantity of biographies written by al-Maqrīzī for each of these letters. Nor is it accurate in terms of the number of biographies for each letter that has been preserved, as here, too, it is hard to know if something is missing. This is clearly exemplified by the apograph and the part of the holograph it is allegedly a copy of: a collation of both manuscripts shows that some 113 biographies were left out by the copyist.

⁵⁴ Despite the fact that the manuscript was bought in 1978, al-Ya'lāwī was unable to consult it when he started work on his first edition of the text because the manuscript needed to be restored and it remained inaccessible for many years. See also n. 12 above.

(MS Pertev 496) for the 1991 edition, he noticed that the newly acquired manuscript did contain some 113 additional biographies that had been overlooked by the copyist of the apograph. Al-Yaʿlāwī decided not to insert those biographies in the correct place in the text, rather they were placed at the end of each letter to which they pertain, as he probably wanted to keep the numbers of the biographies unchanged between the first and the second edition. The additional biographies are numbered according to the biography that precedes them, each receiving a serial number (e.g., 694/1, 694/2, etc.). Consequently, the new edition now contains the 3,635 numbers from the first edition, to which must be added the additional 113 biographies al-Yaʿlāwī found in MS Or. 14533 that are missing in the apograph, i.e., for a total of 3,748 biographies. From this total, we must subtract two empty entries (nos. 623 and 694), seven duplicates, and 178 entries in Ibn Ḥajar's handwriting;⁵⁵ this leaves a total of 3,561 extant entries that can be attributed to al-Maqrīzī.

Clearly, a significant number of biographies are missing, given the letters that are not covered in the preserved manuscripts. In some cases, al-Maqrīzī made cross references to past or forthcoming entries in *al-Muqaffā* and from these cross references, al-Yaʿlāwī was able to list eighty-eight biographies that are now absent in the manuscripts.⁵⁶ Unfortunately, al-Yaʿlāwī did not consider similar cross references that can be identified in al-Maqrīzī's other works.⁵⁷ The perusal of these works results in twenty biographies, of which only four can be found in the actual manuscripts of *al-Muqaffā*. In addition, al-Maqrīzī used to scribble indications to himself, to insert biographies he had taken notes about;⁵⁸ in two instances, some twenty-five biographies have been identified, of which twenty-one are missing in the preserved manuscripts of *al-Muqaffā*. Other scholars who exploited *al-Muqaffā* for their works also provide some indications about missing entries. Al-Suyūṭī and al-Dāʿūdī clearly indicated that *al-Muqaffā* was their source for, respectively, thirty and twenty-five biographies, of which two are redundant in their works. In the case of al-Suyūṭī, thirteen entries that we should find in *al-Muqaffā* are missing, while al-Dāʿūdī's work reveals that five biographies are missing. As a result, the total number of

55 Al-Yaʿlāwī failed to notice any difference in the handwriting and thus included all these biographies as if they were composed by al-Maqrīzī. It must also be stressed that al-Yaʿlāwī overlooked eight biographies in Ibn Ḥajar's handwriting. So the total number of biographies we can attribute to Ibn Ḥajar is 186. For the list of those entries in Ibn Ḥajar's handwriting, see part 2 of this essay, table 1.

56 Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaffā* (1991) viii, 669–75; (2006) viii, 297–301.

57 See appendix 2.

58 See appendix 1. Those biographies are preceded by one of these expressions: yuktab fi *l-Tārikh al-kabīr* in shāʾ llāh; yuktab in shāʾa llāh fi *l-Tārikh al-kabīr* ʿinda taḥrīrihi.

entries that have been preserved, or which we know with certainty were part of *al-Muqaffā*, is 3,704.⁵⁹

Now, if we rely on this figure, it is easier to estimate the size of *al-Muqaffā* that al-Maqrīzī managed to compose before his death: according to Witkam's estimation, the preserved holograph manuscripts represent 64 percent of the 16 original volumes, with an average of 5,814 biographies; according to my estimation of 37 percent of the total, the number of entries would reach 10,011. Had al-Maqrīzī completed *al-Muqaffā* in 80 volumes, as he had planned to do, the work would have included between 29,000 and 50,000 biographies. Whatever the method of calculation, this would have made of *al-Muqaffā* the largest biographical dictionary ever compiled, exceeding even al-Dhahabī's (d. 748/1348) *Tārīkh al-islām* (28,927 entries), and well ahead of the works of his predecessors, namely, Ibn 'Asākir's (d. 571/1176) *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq* (10,226 entries), al-Dhahabī's *Sīyar a'lām al-nubalā'* (5,925), or even al-Ṣafadī's (d. 764/1363) *al-Wāfi bi-l-wafayāt* (14,786). But was it a realistic project? In terms of number of biographies, it was certainly realistic: al-Maqrīzī's contemporary, Ibn Ḥajar, gathered 5,204 entries in *al-Durar al-kāmīna*, and al-Sakhāwī collected 11,748 entries in *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, even though they only focused on the biographies of people who were born or died in the century during which they themselves were born. Al-Maqrīzī could, of course, rely on a great variety of sources that he exploited for his other major works; these include al-Ṣafadī's *al-Wāfi bi-l-wafayāt*, as his notebook housed in Liège demonstrates.⁶⁰ It also seems that he may have relied on another major biographical dictionary that is no longer extant, a work that might have provided him with the necessary impetus to undertake such a huge project. The issue of the title he chose for his work offers some evidence of this.

3 A Title (and the Impetus?) for a Book

The choice of a title for a book in progress is an issue that al-Maqrīzī usually tackled when the work was nearing completion and was almost ready for the making of a fair copy. When he reached that stage, he knew that he would have to think of the introduction to the work, where he usually indicated the title he had chosen. For instance, in a letter he wrote to al-Qalqashandī between

59 The calculation follows: 3,561 + 88 (cross references in *al-Muqaffā*) + 16 (cross references by al-Maqrīzī in his other works: 20–4) + 21 (entries to be added in *al-Muqaffā*: 25–4) + 13 (al-Suyūṭī: 30–17) + 5 (al-Dā'ūdī: 25–18–2).

60 See Bauden, *Maqriziana* I 39–46; Bauden, *Maqriziana* XI.

816/1413 and 821/1418, he mentioned that he was poised to finish his work on the history of Cairo and that he then hoped to prepare the fair copy (*tabyīd*) of another book he had been working on for years.⁶¹ While he provides the full title of the first book (*al-Mawā'iz wa-l-i'tibār fī dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa-l-āthār*)—proof that the said work was almost ready—he only refers to the second with a short description (*mā katabtuhu min akhbār kuttāb al-sirr*).⁶² Notwithstanding his ambitious research agenda, which included several works in the pipeline, he still felt the need to make cross references to some of his forthcoming works. At the end of his life, when he started to work on his last major opus (*al-Khabar 'an al-bashar*),⁶³ he first referred to it with a title (*al-Mabda'*) that was only later, i.e., when he prepared the fair copy, replaced with the one it is now known by.⁶⁴ In the case of *al-Muqaffā*, an unfinished work, we have not found a title or an introduction to it in the preserved holograph manuscripts. However, in his other books, al-Maqrīzī referred to it by a title on numerous occasions, as appendix 2 demonstrates: we find some nineteen occurrences in five books, each of which were composed at different periods of al-Maqrīzī's life as a writer. The title to which he refers varies slightly: *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr al-muqaffā* (12 times); *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr al-muqaffā li-Miṣr* (2 times); *Tārīkh Miṣr al-kabīr al-muqaffā* (2 times); *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr li-Miṣr* (1 time); *Tārīkh Miṣr al-muqaffā* (1 time); *Tārīkh Miṣr al-kabīr* (1 time). In two of his notebooks (see appendix 1), he also noted some biographies that he wanted to add to *al-Muqaffā*, which he referred to as *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr* (2) or *al-Tārīkh* (1). The number of occurrences for each version of the title, indicated between parentheses, shows that al-Maqrīzī was leaning toward a definitive title: *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr al-muqaffā li-Miṣr*, in its long version, or *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr al-muqaffā*, in its shortened version (in total, it appears this way fourteen out of nineteen times). The other renderings only represent a variation of these two versions. Moreover, whenever some scholars who frequented al-Maqrīzī in his old age alluded to this

61 See Bauden, Maqriziana XIII 222.

62 There is evidence that al-Maqrīzī made a fair copy of the second work later, as he refers to it with its full title in the *Khiṭaṭ*: *Khulāṣat al-tibr fī akhbār kuttāb al-sirr*. See Bauden, Maqriziana XIII 216–7. In this respect, note that in the second volume of the first version of the *Khiṭaṭ*, al-Maqrīzī wrote down the titles of the first two books of his historical trilogy (*ʿIqd jawāhir al-asfāt fī akhbār madīnat al-Fuṣṭāṭ* and *Ittiʿāz al-ḥunafāʾ bi-akhbār al-khulafāʾ*) in the corner of the title page (Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi, MS Hazine 1472, fol. 1a). This is an indication that, after he had written this first version of the *Khiṭaṭ*, he decided on their titles, in order to correctly refer to them in the said text.

63 For this work, see Bauden, Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-Maqrīzī.

64 See Bauden, Maqriziana XIV.

work, they did so by the following title: *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr al-muqaffā*.⁶⁵ This further supports the idea that this was the title that al-Maqrīzī chose, referred to in his works, used when he spoke of his biographical dictionary, and probably intended to maintain if he had completed it according to his plan.⁶⁶

Next, we address the meaning of this title. The first word, *tārīkh*, is easy to interpret in light of earlier examples of similar biographical dictionaries that focus on local history, like al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī's (d. 463/1071) *Tārīkh Baghdād* or Ibn 'Asākir's (d. 571/1176) *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*,⁶⁷ and document the lives of important scholars who lived in those cities. The last word is, however, more problematic. In a recent contribution, Witkam proposed to translate *al-muqaffā* as "in continuation" based on the meaning of *qaffā*, "to cause or bid to follow" and "to make verses to rhyme." In its first meaning, the verb appears on four occasions in three Quranic verses (2:87, 5:46, 57:27). It clearly derives from *qafan* (back, occiput) and, in this respect, can be correlated with *dhayl* (tail, bottom), a word that is used by authors to describe books that supplement their own works or that of someone else.⁶⁸ *Al-Muqaffā* must be interpreted in the same way: it is 'The great history in continuation,' as Witkam proposed to translate it, or 'The great complementary history.'

When authors entitled their books, they paid great attention to select a title that was not already applied to another book. They were sensitive about the issue of repetition. A good example of this can be seen in Ibn Ḥajar's title for his commentary on al-Bukhārī's *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, that is, *Faṭḥ al-bārī fī sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. His disciple, al-Sakhāwī, stressed that two other authors had selected similar, if not identical, titles for their commentaries of the same work (respectively *Manḥ al-bārī* and *Faṭḥ al-bārī*) well before Ibn Ḥajar. Ibn Ḥajar responded that he had not consulted those works, highlighting that he was not aware of these titles, and thus clearing himself of responsibility for the

65 Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Manḥal al-ṣāfi* i, 418–9; Ibn Fahd, *Mu'jam* 66; al-Biqā'ī, *Unwān al-zamān* i, 110.

66 Building on the heterogeneity of the titles for *al-Muqaffā*, Witkam, *Reflections* 99–100, claims that the work "never had a real title." He also condemns (ibid. 97) the modern use of *al-Muqaffā* alone to refer to the book (which he calls a "phantom title"); he states that "this is syntactically impossible." To this, we can reply that two authors like al-Suyūṭī and al-Dā'ūdī quoted al-Maqrīzī's biographical dictionary as *al-Muqaffā* (see part 2 of this essay).

67 See Humphreys, *Tārīkh* x, 278.

68 For instance, al-Birzālī's *al-Muqtafi* is presented by the author as a supplement to Abū Shāma's *Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn fī akhbār al-dawlatayn*. See al-Birzālī, *al-Muqtafi* i, 147; Roiland and Sublet, *Le temps d'une vie* 223.

similarities.⁶⁹ In the case of al-Maqrīzī, we know that he was not the first to use the word *al-muqaffā* in parallel with *al-tārīkh*. He was indeed preceded by at least two historians.

Al-Sakhāwī noted that the first one, Ibn Abī l-Damm (d. 642/1244), authored a biographical dictionary organized like the biography of the Prophet, according to the occupation of the biographees (caliphs, jurists, theologians, traditionists, etc.), then in alphabetical order, starting with the Muḥammads, out of respect for the Prophet, then the others in the sequence described. According to al-Sakhāwī, the work was entitled *al-Tārīkh al-muqaffā* or *al-muqtafi*.⁷⁰

The second author is Quṭb al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Karīm b. ‘Abd al-Nūr al-Ḥalabī (d. 735/1335), who was credited by his contemporaries and later historians with a history of Egypt described as rich in content (*ḥāfil*).⁷¹ This history was, in fact, a biographical dictionary alphabetically organized, but starting with Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh out of respect for the Prophet, the first biographee being Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh al-Shāfi‘ī.⁷² While most authors who mention Quṭb al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī’s biographical dictionary just state that it was several volumes (*‘iddat mujalladāt*), of which al-Ḥalabī only had time to make a fair copy of the beginning, i.e., the Muḥammads (which took four volumes), Ibn Ḥajar goes further, saying that the draft consisted of twenty volumes.⁷³ After the author’s death, his son, Taqī l-Dīn Muḥammad (d. 773/1371), continued his father’s work by adding several biographies, particularly in the first four

69 Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Jawāhir wa-l-durar* ii, 675. As the editor of the text noted, Ibn Ḥajar consulted, relied on, and quoted the second commentary with the same title as his own work (ibid. note 1).

70 Al-Sakhāwī, *al-I‘lān* 290 (*al-muqaffā*) and 298 (*al-muqtafi*) = trans., 492 (*al-muqtafā*) and 499 (*al-muqtafā*). Rosenthal says that *al-muqaffā* or *al-muqtafā* is a mistake for *al-Muzaḥḥarī*, but this is the result of confusion with Ibn Abī l-Damm’s other history, *al-Tārīkh al-Muzaḥḥarī*, which is a summary and was so entitled because the author dedicated it to the ruler of Hama, al-Malik al-Muzaḥḥar (r. 626–42/1229–44). While *al-Tārīkh al-muqaffā/al-muqtafi* is considered lost, *al-Tārīkh al-Muzaḥḥarī* has been preserved partially (the first volume contains the biographies of the Prophet and of the Umayyad caliphs). See Ibn Abī l-Damm, *al-Tārīkh al-Muzaḥḥarī* 13.

71 Al-Dhahabī, *al-Ibar* 101–2 (*tārīkh kabīr li-Miṣr*); al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām* liii, 387–9; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi* xix, 80–1 (no. 79); Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-nihāya* i, 361 (no. 1710); Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Durar al-kāmina* ii, 393 (no. 2483); Ibn Ḥajar, *Raf‘ al-iṣr* 3; al-Suyūṭī, *Dhayl* 349–50; Ibn Taghri Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira* ix, 306.

72 Al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* xvi, 43.

73 Ibn Ḥajar, *Raf‘ al-iṣr* 3. In his *al-Durar al-kāmina* ii, 393 (followed by al-Suyūṭī, *Dhayl* 350), he states that, on the contrary, if the author had completed his work it would have been in twenty volumes.

volumes that contained the Muḥammads.⁷⁴ No copy of this history seems to have survived, but a selection made by Ibn Khaṭīb al-Nāṣiriyya (d. 843/1440) has been preserved in part, offering some glimpse of what the original must have looked like.⁷⁵ No specific title is provided for this unfinished biographical dictionary⁷⁶ but al-Maqrīzī, who devoted a few words to Quṭb al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī in the obituaries of *al-Sulūk*, is the only author to state that Quṭb al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī was the author of *Tārīkh Miṣr muqaffan*.⁷⁷ His title almost matches the title of al-Maqrīzī's historical dictionary, with the last word being used as a specification (*tamyīz*) rather than as an epithet.

The title is not the only parallel that can be drawn between these two works. Quṭb al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī's book is described as an alphabetically arranged biographical dictionary of Egyptians.⁷⁸ Al-Maqrīzī is probably the only one to give a specific title to Quṭb al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī's book because he could not ignore its existence, given his research agenda and his publishing program. He himself was the author of a biographical dictionary with a similar scope, so how could he avoid relying on a twenty-volume work, albeit one that was not finished? Ibn Ḥajar and al-Sakhāwī confirm that he indeed used that source. The first pointed out, in his introduction to *Rafʿ al-iṣr*, that Quṭb al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī's *Akḥbār Miṣr* was one of the sources he consulted for the redaction of his book and we can confirm that he owned some holograph volumes of this source.⁷⁹ Even more importantly, Ibn Ḥajar stressed that he also took great advantage of it, through his friend's *Tārīkh*. The friend (*rafiq*) in question is none other than "the imam, the unique, the well-informed Taqī l-Dīn Abī Muḥammad Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. 'Abd al-Qādir al-Tamīmī," i.e., al-Maqrīzī.⁸⁰ Ibn Ḥajar's words confirm

74 Al-Sakhāwī, *al-I'lān* 265 (wa-li-waladihi l-Taqī Muḥammad 'alayhi fihi zawā'id kathīra) = trans. 478; Kātib Ḥalebi, *Kashf al-ẓunūn* i, col. 301 (wa-zāda waladuhu Taqī l-Dīn fī l-Muḥammadīn kathīran).

75 It has recently been published: Ibn Khaṭīb al-Nāṣiriyya, *al-Muntaqā*.

76 Al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* xvi, 43; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi* xix, 81; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira* ix, 306, all speak of a *Tārīkh Miṣr* that Ibn Ḥajar, *Rafʿ al-iṣr* 3, calls *Akḥbār Miṣr*.

77 Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk* ii, 388.

78 Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-nihāya* i, 361 (rattabahu 'alā l-ḥurūf); Kātib Ḥalebi, *Kashf al-ẓunūn* i, col. 301 (ruttiba 'alā l-asmā').

79 He quotes this source on several occasions. See Ibn Ḥajar, *Rafʿ al-iṣr* 69, 128, 139, 187, 324, 341, 345, 364, 370. On some occasions, he specifically refers to the fact that it was a holograph (qara'tu bi-khaṭṭ). Ibn Ḥajar lent the volumes he owned to al-Khayḍarī. See al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'* ix, 119 (kutub amaddahu shaykhunā bi-hā ka-l-mawjūd min *Tārīkh Miṣr* lil-Quṭb al-Ḥalabī ...).

80 Ibn Ḥajar, *Rafʿ al-iṣr* 3. (i'tamadtu 'alā ... thumma 'alā *Akḥbār Miṣr* li-shaykh shuyūkhinā l-ḥāfiẓ Quṭb al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī wa-huwa fī naḥw 'ishrīn mujallada bayyaḍa minhu al-Muḥammadīn fī arba'a wa-stafadtu kathīran min dhālik min *Tārīkh* rafiqī l-imām al-awḥad al-muṭṭali' Taqī l-Dīn Abī Muḥammad Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. 'Abd al-Qādir al-Tamīmī).

that al-Maqrīzī also profited from Quṭb al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī's book for his own *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr al-muqaffā*.

Al-Sakhāwī knew Quṭb al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī's biographical dictionary of Egyptians well, as he stated that he owned more than ten volumes of the holograph draft as well as four volumes of the fair copy containing the Muḥammads (including the author's son's additions).⁸¹ With those volumes in his library, he was able to compare the material with al-Maqrīzī's *al-Muqaffā*; the result of the collation led him to accuse al-Maqrīzī of appropriating the whole draft and summarizing its contents without once citing the source from which he took them.⁸² Though there is no reason to doubt that al-Sakhāwī was right in his accusation, as there is evidence that supports the charge,⁸³ he clearly overlooked the fact that al-Maqrīzī did cite Quṭb al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī on several occasions in *al-Muqaffā*, though al-Maqrīzī did not indicate the specific book he borrowed from.⁸⁴

Al-Maqrīzī's notebook, preserved in Liège, is evidence that he indeed made good use of Quṭb al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī's work. This notebook enabled me to compare groups of biographies of Egyptians, which I had previously been unable to attribute to specific sources, with selections made by Ibn Khaṭīb al-Nāṣiriyya from Quṭb al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī's *Tārīkh Miṣr*. Among these selections, I have identified seven biographies in which the wording and the order in which the data appear tally, even though both texts reflect a summarized version of Quṭb

If Ibn Ḥajar owned Quṭb al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī's holographs, it was after he had completed *Raf' al-iṣr*, because at that time he could only access it through al-Maqrīzī's *al-Muqaffā*.

81 See al-Sakhāwī, *al-I'lān* 265 = trans. 478. He confirms this in his *al-Dhayl* 62 (kamā qara'tuhu bi-khaṭṭihi [al-Quṭb al-Ḥalabī] fī *Tārīkh Miṣr*). In this passage, al-Sakhāwī underscores Ibn Ḥajar's reliance on al-Maqrīzī's *Tārīkh Miṣr* (i.e., *al-Muqaffā*), then notes that the latter was mistaken (see part 2 of this essay).

82 Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Jawāhir wa-l-durar* i, 394 (qultu: wa-kadhā 'amila fī *Tārīkh Miṣr* lil-Quṭb al-Ḥalabī; fa-innahu lam yubayyid minhu ghayr al-Muḥammadīn wa-ba'd al-hamza. Fa-akhadha l-musawwada bi-tamāmihā wa-lakkhāṣa tarājimahā wa-lam yansub lahu fimā ra'aytu wa-lā l-tarjama al-wāḥida). This passage is quoted in Bauden, Maqriziana ix 219, n. 167.

83 See Bauden, Maqriziana ix; Bauden, *al-Maqrīzī's collection*, chapter 3.

84 These quotations also prove that al-Maqrīzī had access to most of the work, the letters covered range from *alif* to *mīm*. We can speculate that he also selected biographies for letters after *mīm* but these were not preserved in *al-Muqaffā*.

See al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaffā* (see table in the footnote on next page).

al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī's work.⁸⁵ The comparison of all this material with the biographies that are now found in al-Maqrīzī's *al-Muqaffā* shows, definitively, that al-Maqrīzī went well beyond the extracted data, and in most cases expanded on the content of each biography with additional material from other sources. Be that as it may, we can surmise that al-Maqrīzī laid his hands on several volumes of a draft, and may have been inspired by more than the title; perhaps more importantly, he was inspired to launch a new project: an alphabetically organized biographical dictionary of all Egyptians, Muslims or not, entitled 'The great history in continuation' or 'The great complementary history.' The question is, what book(s) was this biographical dictionary supposed to supplement?

4 The Scope and the Aim of the Biographical Dictionary

As noted, al-Maqrīzī never completed *al-Muqaffā* according to his plan, rather, he left several bunches of unbound quires at his death. It is hard to know if

1991 edition	2006 edition
i, 187 (no. 183)	i, 116
v, 63 (no. 1597)	v, 41–2
v, 94 (no. 1632)	v, 58
v, 106 (no. 1650)	v, 64
v, 114 (no. 1667)	v, 68
v, 117 (no. 1672)	v, 69
v, 147 (no. 1685)	v, 85
v, 157 (no. 1700)	v, 90
v, 162 (no. 1710)	v, 93
v, 182 (no. 1732)	v, 103
vi, 93 (no. 2526)	vi, 52
vi, 371 (no. 2857)	vi, 198
vii, 38 (no. 3108)	vii, 24
vii, 425 (no. 3508)	vii, 229
vii, 467 (no. 3564)	vii, 250

85 See Bauden, Maqriziana 1/2 112 (no. 3), 113 (no. 11), 115 (nos. 39, 40, 41), 129 (no. 5), 130 (no. 9). These biographies correspond to Ibn Khaṭīb al-Nāṣiriyya, *al-Muntaqā*, respectively 209 (no. 61), 83 (no. 58), 29 (no. 3), 198 (no. 37), 32 (no. 6), 56 (no. 30), 101 (no. 77).

he composed any introduction for this work, which was still in progress, or if he abandoned the idea to do so once he realized that he would not be able to complete the work as planned. If he had written an introduction, he might have applied the eight principia (*al-ru'ūs al-thamāniya*) he had set for the introduction of his *Khīṭaṭ*.⁸⁶ In the absence of such an introduction, it is difficult to understand the scope al-Maqrīzī had fixed for his biographical dictionary, or its aims, beyond the fact that it was logically connected to the scope of his other major works, i.e., the history of Egypt. In this respect, the best way to approach these twin issues is to gather as much information as possible from what al-Maqrīzī scattered in his other works, and to analyze the contents of *al-Muqaffā*, even in its unfinished form. It is also essential to consider the testimonies of al-Maqrīzī's contemporaries, those who knew of and perused *al-Muqaffā*. In what follows, we first deal with the issue of its scope, then tackle the question of the aim of the work.

Ibn Taghrī Birdī is the only contemporary of al-Maqrīzī who reported that the scope of *al-Muqaffā* was to gather the biographies of those of note who were born in or traveled to Egypt.⁸⁷ From this, we can infer that al-Maqrīzī had planned to compose a dictionary that would gather the biographies of Egyptians, this word being taken in its broadest sense, i.e., not only those born in Egypt, but also those who set foot on its soil for a period of time, regardless of how long. The prerequisite of birth obviously made sense, but used exclusively, would have left out all those who contributed to the history of Egypt, but were born in another region of the Islamic world (like Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn, for instance). While this short description is definitely helpful, because it indicates how the work was perceived by one of al-Maqrīzī's students, it must be corroborated by what al-Maqrīzī himself said about the work and what the material he gathered in this biographical dictionary actually demonstrates. Occasional references to the scope of the work can be found in *al-Muqaffā* itself. In the biography of al-Manṣūr bi-llāh, the Fāṭimid caliph (r. 334–41/946–53) who died in Ifrīqiya and never visited Egypt, al-Maqrīzī explains,

ولما قدم المعز لدين الله أبو تميم معد إلى القاهرة كان معه توابيت آبائه [...] فدفنهم بتربة القصر من القاهرة فلذلك ذكرته في كتابي هذا.⁸⁸

86 These are the objective, the title, the utility, the position, and the authenticity of the book, the art it falls under, the number of parts it contains, and the methods it uses to convey information. See al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā'iz wa-l-i'tibār* i, 6–9.

87 Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Manhal al-ṣāfi* i, 419–20 (fi tarājim ahl Miṣr wa-l-wāridin ilayhā).

88 Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaffā* (1991 ed.) ii, 179 = (2006 ed.) ii, 104.

When al-Muʿizz li-Dīn Allāh Abū Tamīm Maʿadd (r. 341–65/953–75) arrived in Cairo, he took with him the coffins of his ancestors ... and he buried them in the mausoleum inside the palace in Cairo. This is why I mentioned him [al-Manṣūr bi-llāh] in this book of mine.

Thanks to this quotation, we can understand that, for inclusion in *al-Muqaffā*, a person's whole body or any part thereof, dead or alive, must have touched the ground of Egypt. This is corroborated by other examples, in which the simple fact that the head of a person had been brought to Egypt earned him the right to receive some treatment in the dictionary:

ثم قتلوا وصلبوا وحملت رؤوسهم إلى مصر فطيف بها في القاهرة في شوال.
فلذلك ذكرت خلفا هذا وهو من شرط هذا الكتاب.⁸⁹

They [Khalaf b. Khayr and some of his relatives] were killed and crucified [in al-Manṣūriyya, near Qayrawan]. Then their heads were brought to Egypt and circulated around Cairo in the month of Shawwāl. This is why I mentioned this Khalaf, as he meets the requirements of this book.

The categories of persons taken into account for inclusion in *al-Muqaffā* are broad. Al-Maqrīzī did not limit himself to any given group. In addition to some prophets and prominent figures who lived in the pre-Islamic period, he took into consideration caliphs, sultans, amirs, belletrists, judges, traditionists, and historians, but not exclusively. In terms of the religion of the biographees, he included people from the various heterodox movements of Islam, as well as those of other religions.⁹⁰

In addition to the issue of the biographees' relationship with the land of Egypt, now elucidated, there must have been, as is inevitably the case with similar works, a temporal prerequisite. This question can only be approached by thoroughly analyzing the 3,561 biographies that are still available in the preserved manuscripts. The date of death of each biographee was taken as a reference to understand al-Maqrīzī's chosen time span. For the sake of convenience, death dates have been arranged for twenty-five-year periods (in *hijrī* years). The following chart (see fig. 3.3) shows that, for the Islamic period,

89 Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaffā* (1991 ed.) iii, 762 (no. 1373) = (2006 ed.) iii, 432 (no. 1373). Another emblematic case regards the Prophet's grandson, al-Ḥusayn (see *al-Muqaffā* [1991 ed.] iii, 567–616, no. 1250 = [2006 ed.] iii, 320–47, no. 1250), whose head was said to have been brought to Cairo from ʿAsqalān in 548/1153.

90 See Zaydān, Manhaj al-Maqrīzī 210–2.

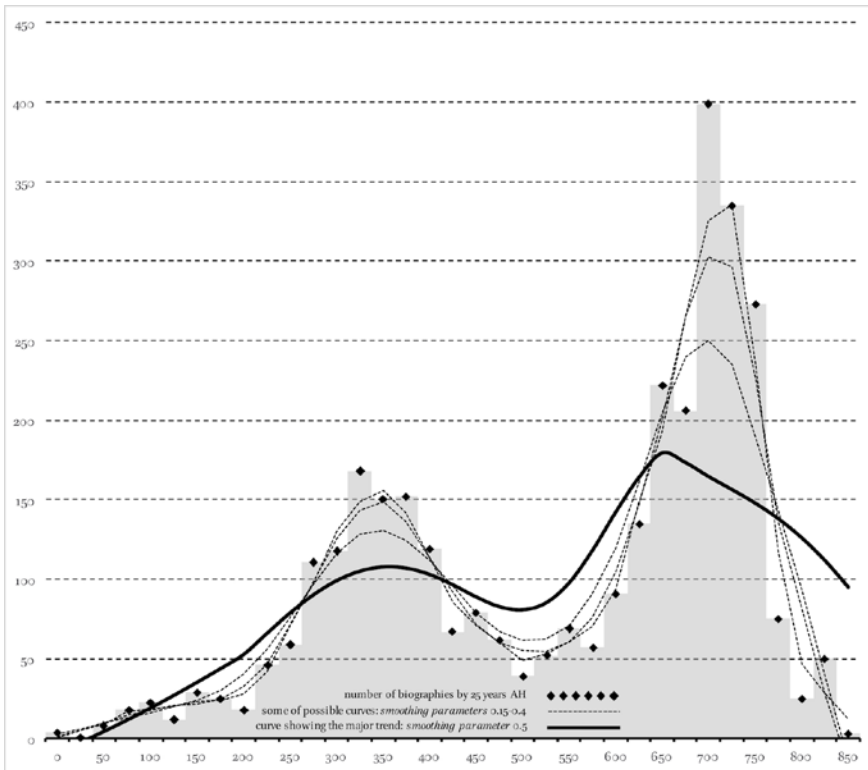


FIGURE 3.3 Chart showing the number of biographies in *al-Muqaffā* for twenty-five-year periods (in *hijrī* years), based on death dates

al-Maqrīzī covered the whole span, from the emergence of Islam up to his own time.⁹¹ In some cases, he even considered figures who were born before Islam, e.g., prophets like Abraham, or rulers like al-Muqawqis.

The two peaks in the chart reveal the periods for which al-Maqrīzī had access to a greater number of sources. The first one (with an apex in 325 AH) corresponds to the first period of Muslim rule in Egypt, soon followed by a slump that coincides with the Fāṭimid period. As is well known, we have few sources from that period, and it would seem as if this was already the case

91 In this chart, we do not account for 369 biographees whose precise dates of death are not known. Moreover, we must keep in mind that only some letters of the alphabet are represented in the preserved manuscripts and some names (like Aḥmad and Muḥammad, for instance) are overrepresented in comparison with others. This may impact the conclusions that we can draw from the data.

in al-Maqrīzī's time, though he is, incidentally, regarded as a preserver in this respect. The start (in the year 575 AH) of the second peak precisely aligns with the end of the Fāṭimid period and the beginning of Ayyūbid rule. From then on, the number of biographies exponentially increases until it reaches its apex in the year 700 AH.⁹² This increase is revealing, because it reflects the period corresponding to the Sunnī revival, but is also evidence that numerous sources became available (both biographical dictionaries and chronicles). Al-Maqrīzī relied on several of these; his notebook preserved in Liège is a witness to his research process, notably in preparation for *al-Muqaffā*.⁹³ Interestingly, the chart also shows a steep fall for the period that follows the years 750 AH, with a lower minimum reached for the years around 800 AH.⁹⁴ Such a decrease is a surprise because it coincides with al-Maqrīzī's lifetime, during which he had ample opportunity to take note of the events related to his contemporaries, not to mention the fact that he could also rely on sources composed by historians who had passed away in the early ninth/fifteenth century, like Ibn al-Furāt (d. 807/1405) and Ibn Duqmāq (d. 809/1406). The reason for the sharp decrease in the number of biographies after 750 AH can easily be explained by the aim of *al-Muqaffā*.

For this, it is essential to consider some passages in which al-Maqrīzī emphasizes his objectives for this work. In his *Khiṭaṭ*, he explains the following (see fig. 3.4):

[...] وستقف ان شا الله على ذكر من ملك من الاكراد والاتراك والجراسة

[beg. of addition that continues in the margin]

- 92 Maxim Romanov had similar results with al-Dhahabī's *Tārīkh al-islām*, whose geographical scope is much larger than *al-Muqaffā*, as it covers the whole Muslim world. Romanov states, "Interestingly, the Shī'ite century occupies almost the entire declining segment of the curve, while the end of the Fāṭimid dynasty marks the point where the curve returns to its highest point before the decline." Romanov, Digital age 145 (based on Romanov, *Computational reading* 71–4).
- 93 In addition to the biographies now identified as originating in Qutb al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī's *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr*, the Liège notebook also contains a partially preserved résumé of al-Ṣafadī's *al-Wāfi*. See Bauden, *Maqriziana* 1/1 39–46.
- 94 The slight increase in the last period, after 825 AH, can be explained by the fact that some of the biographies found in the manuscripts of *al-Muqaffā* for that period must be attributed to *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farida*, as noted (see above 73–4).

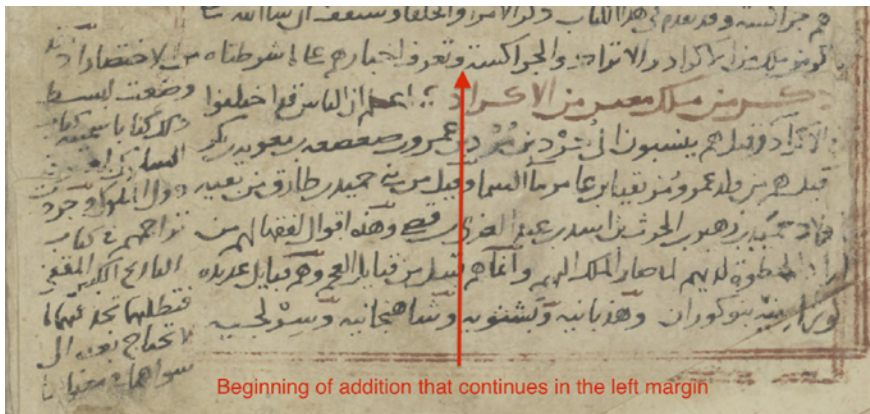


FIGURE 3.4 al-Maqrīzī's fair copy of *al-Khiṭaṭ*

COURTESY MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY (ANN ARBOR), MS 605, P. 495

و تعرف اخبارهم على ما شرطناه || من الاختصار اذ قد || وضعت لبسط || ذلك
 كتابا سميته كتاب || السلوك لمعرفة || دول الملوك وجردت || تراجمهم في كتاب
 || التاريخ الكبير المقفى || فطلبهما تجد فيهما ما || لا تحتاج بعده الى || سواهما
 معناه

[end of addition].⁹⁵

[In what follows] you will find, God willing, an account of the Kurds, the Turks and the Circassians who ruled and you will become cognizant of their stories in the brief [format] that we stipulated, as I composed a book to detail [their stories] that I have entitled *al-Sulūk li-ma'rifat duwal al-mulūk* [The path to knowledge of the dynasties of kings], and I wrote their biographies in the book *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr al-muqaffā* [The great complementary history]. So, look for these and you will find in these [books information] about them [the sultans, such] that you will not need to [search for] anywhere else later.

He repeats roughly the same statement in various places of *al-Sulūk*. First, in the introduction (see fig. 3.5, below), he says,

95 Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā'iz wa-l-i'tibār* iii, 751. The figure comes from the fair copy of the *Khiṭaṭ* that can be dated shortly after the year 831/1428. It shows that the passage where he mentions *al-Sulūk* and *al-Muqaffā* is a later addition.

ويحوي أكثر ما في أيامهم من الحوادث والمجريات غير معتن فيه بالتراجم
والوفيات لاني افردت لها تاليفاً بديع المثال بعيد المنال.⁹⁶

It [*al-Sulūk*] gathers most of the events and happenings that took place in their [the Ayyūbid and Mamlūk sultans] days, without concern for the biographies and obituaries, because I devoted to these an incomparable work of an unprecedented example.

A similar statement is further repeated under the year 733/1333:

وقد ذكرنا ترجمته في كتابنا الكبير المقفى بما فيه كفاية إذ هو كتاب تراجم ووفيات
كما أن هذا كتاب حوادث ومجريات.⁹⁷

We have already mentioned that which suffices regarding his [Baktamur al-Sāqī] biography in our large book *al-Muqaffā* [Great complementary book]⁹⁸ as it is a book of biographies and obituaries, while this is a book of events and happenings.

In the same work, under the year 812/1409, he declares,

وقد بسطت ترجمته في التاريخ الكبير المقفى وفي كتاب درر العقود الفريدة في
تراجم الأعيان المفيدة هو وكل من له وفاة في هذا الجزء ويستحق بها أن يذكر
إما بشهرته أو بفضيلته.⁹⁹

I have already reported his [Yūsuf b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Bīrī] biography extensively in *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr al-muqaffā* [The great complementary history]¹⁰⁰ and in *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda fī tarājim al-aʿyān al-mufīda* [The matchless pearl necklaces for the useful biographies of the notables].¹⁰¹ [This is valid] for him and all of those who have an obituary in this volume [*al-Sulūk*] by which he deserves to be mentioned, either because of his fame or his merit.

96 Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk* i, 9. This passage is also a marginal addition made in the fair copy of the first volume of *al-Sulūk*. For its dating, see next section.

97 Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk* ii, 365.

98 Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaffā* (1991 ed.) ii, 468–74 = (2006 ed.) ii, 269–72 (no. 939).

99 Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk* iv, 129.

100 This biography is now missing in the preserved manuscripts of *al-Muqaffā*.

101 Al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda* iii, 562–72 (no. 1459).

In all these passages, al-Maqrīzī indicates that *al-Muqaffā* was conceived as a biographical dictionary, in which he would record the lives of those he happened to mention in his other works, i.e., *al-Sulūk* or *al-Khiṭaṭ* for the above quotations, but not exclusively, as the cross references in his other works confirm (see appendix 2). Consequently, the aim of *al-Muqaffā* was to provide a useful supplement or complement to al-Maqrīzī's other works, hence its title 'The great complementary history.' What he did not consider, when he started the composition of that biographical dictionary, is that he would undertake another work that would replicate, in part, *al-Muqaffā*: a biographical dictionary of his contemporaries, i.e., those who died or were born in or after the decade during which he was born (760/1359), not only those he met or Egyptians, but also strangers with whom he had no contact, i.e., *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda*.¹⁰² When he conceived this new book, al-Maqrīzī was of course aware that part of the data would appear in both works, as the last passage quoted testifies. Even though some duplicate biographies can indeed be found in *al-Muqaffā*, al-Maqrīzī undoubtedly wanted to avoid repeating the data in two different places. Thus, the reason for the steep fall in the number of biographies in *al-Muqaffā* after 760/1359 must be related to his decision to devote a specific dictionary to the people who lived during his lifetime. His decision is central to our understanding of the relationship between the two biographical dictionaries, as well as the issue of when al-Maqrīzī made up his mind about such a project. This brings us to the place of *al-Muqaffā* in al-Maqrīzī's writing program.

5 The Place of *al-Muqaffā* in the Author's Writing Program

In the absence of a precise date provided by al-Maqrīzī for the beginning of the composition of *al-Muqaffā*, we must focus our attention on external and internal details identified not only in the manuscripts of the said work but also in his other books where he referred to *al-Muqaffā* to precisely reconstruct the underlying reasons for the project and writing process. In so doing, we must pay great attention to the true meaning of some passages, particularly those for which a reproduction of the manuscript is unfortunately unavailable. For example, in the following sentence identified in al-Maqrīzī's *Durar al-ʿuqūd*

102 In this, he followed the example of al-Ṣafadī who, in addition to *al-Wāfi*, also composed a dictionary of his contemporaries, *A'yān al-ʿaṣr bi-a'wān al-naṣr*, where he includes biographies quite similar to those in *al-Wāfi*, though in the former he quotes more poetry and uses rhymed prose.

al-farīda, he speaks of Muhannā b. ʿĪsā, the amir of the Arabs at the time of the sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, and states,¹⁰³

ثم كانت له [مهنا بن عيسى] مع السلطان الملك الناصر محمد بن قلاوون أنباء
وقصص قد ذكرتها سنة ثنتي [sic] عشرة في ترجمته من التاريخ الكبير المقفى.

Then there were reports and stories regarding him [Muhannā b. ʿĪsā] with the sultan, the king, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn, that I have already mentioned in the year 12 in his biography in [my work,] *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr al-muqaḥḥā* [The great complementary history].

At first sight, this passage might be interpreted to mean that al-Maqrīzī composed the biography of Muhannā b. ʿĪsā in *al-Muqaḥḥā* in [8]¹² (/1409–10). The mode of expression is no doubt elliptic and thus ambiguous.¹⁰⁴ However, it is better understood with the sentence that immediately follows it in the text, where al-Maqrīzī says that Muhannā's brother took his place as amir of the Arabs in 712/1312–3.¹⁰⁵ Consequently, in the preceding sentence, he simply alludes to his mention of these events in Muhannā's biography under the year [7]¹².¹⁰⁶ Thus, for our purpose, this passage could be misleading.

External features in al-Maqrīzī's holograph manuscripts are more significant and helpful to our understanding of the inter-relationship between his various works and, consequently, of his writing program. One of these external features relates to the writing material. In addition to blank paper, al-Maqrīzī also used scraps of chancery documents.¹⁰⁷ In the manuscripts of *al-Muqaḥḥā*, 65 leaves (= 4.1 percent of the total, i.e., 1,577 leaves¹⁰⁸) were identified as

103 Al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda* iii, 512.

104 It is possible that the editor of the text made a mistake in transcribing this passage. Unfortunately, the unique complete manuscript of *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda* was owned by the editor, al-Jalīlī, who lived in Mosul and refused to share a reproduction of it. See n. 39 above.

105 Fa-wallā ʿiwaḍahu akhāhu Faḍl b. ʿĪsā fī sanat ithnatay ʿashara wa-sabʿimīʾa. Al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda* iii, 512.

106 Muhannā b. ʿĪsā's biography in *al-Muqaḥḥā* is lost. In al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's biography, al-Maqrīzī nevertheless hints at Muhannā's collusion with the Mongol ruler in the said year (712), behavior that led al-Nāṣir Muḥammad to dismiss Muhannā as amir of the Arabs and to substitute his brother for him. See al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaḥḥā* (1991 ed.) vii, 202–3 = (2006 ed.) vii, 113.

107 See Bauden, The recovery. This reused paper features primarily in his drafts, notebooks, and résumés, in other words, in the first stages of his personal works and working tools.

108 Nine leaves in MS Or. 1366a; twelve in MS Or. 3075; five in MS Or. 1366c; twenty-five in MS Or. 14533; fourteen in MS Ar. 2144.

corresponding to the category of reused paper.¹⁰⁹ In some cases, the original documents can be reconstructed and even accurately dated. This is true for fourteen leaves that belong to the same document, a Qara Qoyunlu letter datable to the year 818/1415.¹¹⁰ These leaves are found in two volumes¹¹¹ and are almost always contiguous, even though they contain different biographies. Clearly, al-Maqrīzī inserted these leaves of reused paper to add those biographies to the already assembled quires. In this way, he preserved the integrity of the said quires and respected the correct alphabetical order. Thanks to the dating of the original document, we can demonstrate that these biographies were redacted for inclusion in *al-Muqaffā* after 818/1415, and this constitutes a *terminus post quem*.¹¹² Nevertheless, we are unable to state exactly when, after that date, al-Maqrīzī penned these additional biographies, because we cannot know when the document was discarded by the chancery and reused by al-Maqrīzī.

Another external feature we must take into consideration relates to marginalia, specifically emendations added by al-Maqrīzī to his holographs, as these can help us date (approximately) the inclusion of a reference and thus refine the chronological order of some of his works, like *al-Muqaffā*, in his working schedule. Such an intriguing example appears in the first volume of *al-Sulūk* (the only holograph preserved for that work), as fig. 3-5 shows.

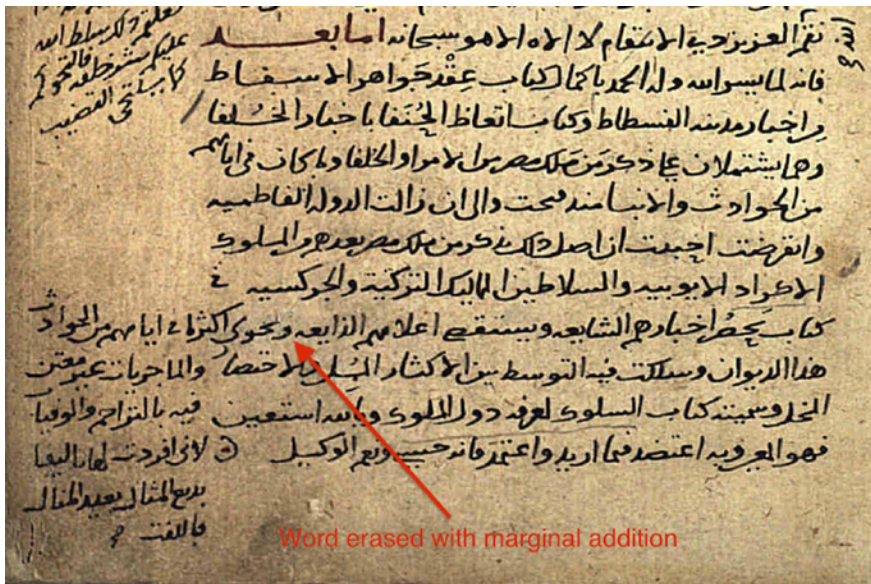
اما بعد || فانه لما يسر الله وله الحمد بأكمال كتاب عَقْد جَوَاهِر الاسفاط || من
 اخبار مدينة الفسطاط وكتاب اتعاظ الحنفا باخبار الخلفا || وهما يشتملان على
 ذكر مَنْ مَلِك مصر من الامراء والخلفاء وما كان في ايامهم || من الحوادث والانبأ
 منذ فتحت والى ان زالت الدولة الفاطمية || وانقرضت احيث ان اصل ذلك بذكر
 من ملك مصر بعدهم من الملوك || الاكراد الايوبية والسلاطين المماليك التركية
 والجركية في || كتاب يَحْصُر اخبارهم الشائعة ويستقصي اعلامهم الذائعة [beg.
 [of marginal addition] ويحوي أكثر ما في ايامهم من الحوادث || والماجريات

109 On the basis of the statement made in n. 106 above, we can conclude that most of *al-Muqaffā* is composed of a fair copy of the text.

110 The letter was addressed by Qarā Yūsuf to al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh, when al-Maqrīzī was no longer working in the chancery. See Bauden, *Diplomatic entanglements*; Bauden, *Mamluk diplomatics* 8–9.

111 MS Or. 1366c, fols. 15–6, 25–7, 29, 37, and MS Or. 14533, fols. 331–2, 371–2, 373, 388–9.

112 This system can be applied to the other leaves of reused paper but their overall small number, in comparison with the rest of the “normal” paper (only 4.1 percent), does not allow a general application.

FIGURE 3.5 *al-Sulūk*

COURTESY SÜLEYMANIYE KÜTÜPHANESİ (İSTANBUL), MS YENİ CAMI 887,
FOL. 4A

غير معتن || فيه بالتراجم والوفيات || لاني افردت لها تاليفا || بديع المثال بعيد
المثال || فاللفت صح [end of marginal addition] || هذا الديوان وسلكت فيه
التوسط بين الاكثار المِل والمِل والاختصار || المخل وسميته كتاب السلوك لمعرفة
دول الملوك وبالله استعين || فهو المعين وبه اعتضد فيما اريد واعتمد فانه حسبي
ونعم الوكيل.

We can see that al-Maqrīzī erased a word at the end of the fourth line before the end,¹¹³ over which he wrote *wa-yaḥwī*. This meant he could connect the later marginal addition with the remainder of the text. Before the marginal addition, al-Maqrīzī was explaining that *al-Sulūk* is a book that chronicles the events that took place under the rule of the Ayyūbids and the Mamlūks. The marginal addition is a further specification: the sole aim of *al-Sulūk* was to narrate the events and happenings of the periods in question and not to detail the biographies and obituaries of the persons who lived at that time because,

¹¹³ The word فاللفت (sic) that is found at the end of the marginal addition was probably replaced by ويحوي.

he stresses, he has composed another book for this specific purpose.¹¹⁴ While he did not mention the title of the biographical dictionary, it is easy to identify it with *al-Muqaffā*, whose scope and aim are detailed above.¹¹⁵ This addition also conveys significant information: when a fair copy of the first volume of *al-Sulūk* was made, al-Maqrīzī explained that his work would not deal with biographies and obituaries because he had another work that already fulfilled that purpose: *al-Muqaffā*. The question is, when did he jot down this marginal addition? To answer this, we must now investigate when the first volume of *al-Sulūk*, in which this marginal addition appears, was produced. In the third volume of *al-Sulūk*, where he describes a custom that was instituted in 791/1389, al-Maqrīzī informs his reader that it was still observed at the time he was writing, i.e., in 820/1417.¹¹⁶ Thanks to this indication, we know with certainty that the first volume was written before that date, but how long before?

We can marshal other evidence regarding the place of *al-Muqaffā* in al-Maqrīzī's literary production by means of the source al-Maqrīzī chiefly relied on for the composition of *al-Sulūk*. As established by several scholars,¹¹⁷ al-Maqrīzī borrowed heavily from Ibn al-Furāt's *al-Ṭarīq al-wāḍiḥ al-maslūk ilā ma'rifat tarājim al-khulafā' wa-l-mulūk*.¹¹⁸ If *al-Sulūk* owes much to Ibn al-Furāt's chronicle, al-Maqrīzī could not have finished *al-Sulūk* before he had summarized the contents of *al-Ṭarīq al-wāḍiḥ al-maslūk*. Fortunately, we know precisely when this summarization process took place, as al-Maqrīzī left a

114 He also states this in *al-Sulūk* (ii, 365), when speaking of Baktamur al-Sāqī under the year 733 AH. See the preceding section for the quotation of that passage.

115 The editor of that section of *al-Sulūk*, Muṣṭafā Ziyāda, noted that the book referred to there by al-Maqrīzī might be *Durar al-'uqūd al-farīda* (al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk* i, 9, n. 3). This is impossible, as this biographical dictionary considers only those who were born or died after 760 AH, i.e., the beginning of the decade in which al-Maqrīzī himself was born. See al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-'uqūd al-farīda* i, 62 (min ibtidā' sanat sittin wa-sab'imi'a).

116 See al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk* iii, 639 (fa-stamarra ilā yawminā min sanat 'ishrīn wa-thamānīmī'a).

117 Little, *An introduction* 77 (year 694/1294–5: "The point to be emphasized, however, is that for this year *al-Sulūk* is nothing more than a paraphrase of *Tārīḥ ad-duwal wal-mulūk*, a paraphrase, moreover, which omits the single original contribution made by Ibn al-Furāt"; Little could not make the same comparison for the years 699/1299–1300 and 705/1305–6, as these are not part of the preserved manuscripts of Ibn al-Furāt's chronicle); Amitai, al-Maqrīzī as a historian 100 ("... for the first decades of the Mamluk Sultanate (up to 696/1296–7), al-Maqrīzī's *Sulūk* should be read in conjunction with his main, and at times exclusive (particularly for 658–80/1260–81), source. I am referring to the chronicle of the Egyptian historian ... Ibn al-Furāt"); Massoud, *The chronicles* 191 ("Later, al-Maqrīzī would make massive use of Ibn al-Furāt's work, largely by editing it, in order to write the annals of his *Kitāb al-Sulūk*").

118 Ibn al-Furāt's chronicle is usually quoted as *Tārīkh al-duwal wa-l-mulūk*. In a forthcoming study, I propose to revisit the question of the title and the scope of Ibn al-Furāt's chronicle.

note when he consulted three holograph volumes of Ibn al-Furāt's chronicle (see table 3.2).¹¹⁹

Thanks to these notes from 818–9/1415–6, in which al-Maqrīzī declared that he prepared a résumé (*intaqāhu*),¹²⁰ we can establish that *al-Sulūk* was in the preliminary stages of composition at that time.¹²¹ As we see above, one year later, in 820/1417, al-Maqrīzī announced that he was narrating the events of the year 791/1389. Such a quick redaction process can only be appreciated in light of what has been shown, namely, that he relied heavily on Ibn al-Furāt's chronicle. On that basis, we can be certain that the first volume of *al-Sulūk* must have originated in 820/1417, this date constituting the *terminus a quo*.

With regard to the *terminus ante quem*, the manuscripts also offer conclusive evidence. Contrary to al-Maqrīzī's affirmation in his introduction to *al-Sulūk*—and even after his addition about writing a biographical dictionary and his consequent decision to avoid biographies and obituaries—he did insert obituaries, but only for the Mamlūk period, starting from the year 648/1250 when Aybak seized power.¹²² While the edition of *al-Sulūk* does not refer to

119 Rabat, al-Khizāna al-Āmma lil-Kutub wa-l-Wathā'iḳ, MS 241Q, fol. 1a:

اتقاه داعيا لملكه احمد بن علي المقرئ في محرم سنة ٨١٨

[/March–April 1415]; Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Ar. 726, fol. 291b:

اتقاه داعيا لملكه أحمد بن علي المقرئ في شهر ربيع الاول سنة ٨١٨

[/June–July 1415]; Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS A.F. 123, fol. 95b:

اتقاه داعيا لملكه احمد بن علي المقرئ ففرغ منه في صفر سنة ٨١٩

[/April 1416]. The fact that we lack a similar note in the majority of the volumes does not necessarily mean that al-Maqrīzī did not read and summarize them. We can demonstrate that those volumes are not complete and that al-Maqrīzī's note probably appeared on a leaf that is now missing. On the other hand, some of the volumes where al-Maqrīzī's note of consultation is absent do have marginal notes in his hand (see Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MSS A.F. 123 and 125). As he himself confirms, he could access Ibn al-Furāt's chronicle (*waqaftu 'alayhā*) and take advantage of it (*wa-stafadtū minhā*). See al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda* iii, 227.

120 See Bauden, *Maqriziana* II 73, 81, and 83.

121 The time it took al-Maqrīzī to summarize two consecutive volumes of Ibn al-Furāt's chronicle (years 625–38, finished in March–April, and 639–59, finished in June–July) might indicate that he was exploiting the material immediately after consulting it, that is, that he composed his own chronicle for the years in question after the résumé was completed. This assumption supports the idea that Ibn al-Furāt's chronicle was the backbone of *al-Sulūk*.

122 These obituaries are introduced by what became a standard expression placed at the end of each year: *wa-māta fī hādhihi l-sana min al-a'yān*. See al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk* i, 380–1. Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Iʿlān* 229 = trans. 455, indeed regards *al-Sulūk* as a chronicle that combined events and obituaries, though he failed to underline that these are only given for the

TABLE 3.2 MSS of Ibn al-Furāt's *al-Ṭarīq al-wāḍiḥ al-maslūk* and al-Maqrīzī's dates of consultation

Years	Manuscript	al-Maqrīzī's dates of consultation
501–21	Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS A.F. 117	
522–43	Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS A.F. 118	
544–62	Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS A.F. 119	
563–7, 586–8, 591–9	Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS A.F. 120	
600–24	Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS A.F. 121	
625–38	Rabat, al-Khizāna al-ʿĀmma lil-Kutub wa-l-Wathāʾiq, MS 241Q	Muḥarram 818/ March–April 1415
639–59	Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Ar. 726	Rabīʿ 1 818/June– July 1415
660–71	Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS A.F. 122	[The manuscript contains marginal notes in al-Maqrīzī's hand]
672–82	Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS A.F. 123	Šafar 819/April 1416
683–96	Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS A.F. 124	
789–99	Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS A.F. 125	[The manuscript contains marginal notes in al-Maqrīzī's hand]

Mamlūk period: “al-Maqrīzī, *as-Sulūk*, in four volumes. In the work, al-Maqrīzī restricted himself to the rulers of Egypt after the final disappearance of the Fāṭimid dynasty, that is, the Ayyūbid Kurds and the Turkish and Circassian Mamlūk Sulṭāns. He included a brief

any significant change in the holograph manuscript from this point onwards, it appears that the manuscript displays a compelling feature: the obituaries in the first volume were added, for the most part, on slips of paper, or, in other cases, in the margins and in the body of the text; in the latter case, the obituaries clearly filled a blank. This feature reveals, beyond doubt, a shift in al-Maqrīzī's initial decision not to include obituaries.¹²³ Al-Maqrīzī changed his mind and this change can be dated, thanks to another of his holograph manuscripts that has recently surfaced: his résumé of Ibn Ḥabīb's (d. 779/1377) *Durrat al-aslāk fī dawlat al-Atrāk* (years 648–777 AH).¹²⁴ This manuscript is quintessential for our purpose because of the obituaries that this résumé contains. A comparison of the latter with those in the first volume of *al-Sulūk* indicates an exact correspondence.¹²⁵ Given that al-Maqrīzī specifies that he completed the résumé in 824/1421, the insertion of the obituaries in the first volume of *al-Sulūk* can be dated accordingly, i.e., to 824/1421 or shortly after. Thanks to all this information, this fair copy of *al-Sulūk* can be dated between 820/1417 at the earliest (i.e., the year following his perusal of Ibn al-Furāt's chronicle), and 824/1421 at the latest (i.e., the year he summarized Ibn Ḥabīb's *Durrat al-aslāk* and inserted obituaries in the first volume of *al-Sulūk*, exclusively on the basis of that source).¹²⁶ The marginal note he incorporated in the introduction, where he stated the contrary of what he opted to do post-824/1421, can thus be located between those two dates (820/1417 and 824/1421).

So far, these external elements (reused paper) and internal elements (marginalia and references) permit us to assign a date to some parts that were added to *al-Muqaffā* and to later references to it in al-Maqrīzī's other works. What

treatment of the events in their days. For each year, he mentioned the cases of death which God had willed to happen (in that particular year). He continued the work to the year of his own death."

123 Note that the chronicle of the Fāṭimid period, *Itti'āz al-hunafā'*—and probably the one for the preceding period, *Iqd jawāhir al-asfāt*, so far considered lost—, and completed before *al-Sulūk*, is entirely devoid of any obituaries.

124 Dushanbe, Kitobhona-i milli-i Tojikiston, MS 1790. See Bahramiyān, *Fihrist* 91; Bahramiyān, *Athar-i nāshinākhatah az Maqrīzī*. The MS is acephalous and starts in the middle of the year 649 AH.

125 They are mentioned in the same order and the words chosen are definitely traceable to this résumé. This is the subject of a forthcoming study on al-Maqrīzī's résumé of Ibn Ḥabīb's *Durrat al-aslāk* and its relationship with *al-Sulūk* in which I address the reason he finally decided to add obituaries for the Mamlūk period.

126 The dating proposed by the above analysis is further strengthened by the dating of the first volume of *Itti'āz al-hunafā'*, whose completion can be placed before 824/1421. See Bauden, *Maqriziana* XII 70. In any case, it contradicts N. Rabbat's dating as he reported it to Massoud, al-Maqrīzī as a historian 133 (*al-Sulūk* was written sometime around or after 824–6/1421–3).

remains to be established is when the idea of composing a comprehensive biographical dictionary occurred to him. The idea for such a project must have been related to the parallel project of a biographical dictionary that would be solely devoted to his contemporaries, i.e., *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda*. For the latter, al-Maqrīzī explains in the introduction that he had the idea to write the biographies of his contemporaries when he noticed that, when he was not yet fifty, he was losing his best friends and relatives.¹²⁷ If we are to give credit to his words, al-Maqrīzī was thus inspired to narrate their lives around 816/1413, when he was reaching his fifties.¹²⁸ At that time, the first version of the *Khiṭaṭ* was nearing completion¹²⁹ and he was about to start work on his historical trilogy in chronological order (first, the beginning of Islam in Egypt up to the advent of the Fāṭimids; second, the rule of the Fāṭimids; and third, the more recent period).¹³⁰ We have seen that some biographies of contemporaries also found their way into *al-Muqaffā*.¹³¹ This duplication of the data seems to reflect al-Maqrīzī's initial intent to conceive the scopes of the two biographical dictionaries as separate entities. As indicated in the preceding section, *al-Muqaffā* was meant to gather the biographies of those who lived, died or passed by Egypt, mainly (but not exclusively) in the Islamic period; by contrast, the aim of *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda* was to collect the biographies of al-Maqrīzī's contemporaries who were born or died after 760/1359, i.e., the decade in which he himself was born, and this he did not restrict to Egypt. This distinction of scope allowed him to deal with the same person in both dictionaries, as the following quotation from the biography in *al-Muqaffā* about an individual who died in 800/1398 confirms:

127 Al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda* i, 61 (fa-innī mā nāhaztu min sinī l-ʿumr al-khamsīn ḥattā faqadtu muʿzam al-aṣḥāb wa-l-aqrabīn).

128 Of course, the *hijrī* era is taken into consideration here.

129 See Bauden, Maqriziana II; Bauden, Maqriziana XIII.

130 As he confirms in his introduction to *al-Sulūk* i, 9 (see above, fig. 5): am mā baʿd: fa-innahu lammā yassara llāh wa-lahu l-ḥamd bi-ikmāl *Kitāb ʿIqd jawāhir al-asfāt min akhbār madīnat al-Fuṣṭāṭ wa-Kitāb Ittīʿāz al-ḥunafāʾ bi-akhbār al-khulafāʾ* ...

131 I am not referring here to those biographies that belong to *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda* and were inserted in the manuscripts of *al-Muqaffā* after al-Maqrīzī's death. These are easy to identify because the text of those biographies tallies exactly with the version found in what is, presumably, an apograph of *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda*. See above, 73–4.

وقد ذكرته بأبسط من هذا في كتابي درر العقود الفريدة في تراجم الأعيان المفيدة.

And I have mentioned him more extensively than this in my book *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda fi tarājim al-aʿyān al-mufīda* [The matchless pearl necklaces of the useful biographies of the notables].¹³²

While this is the only cross reference to *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda* in *al-Muqaffā*,¹³³ in the latter we can identify no fewer than four.¹³⁴ This imbalance in the cross references might indicate that *al-Muqaffā* was the first biographical dictionary al-Maqrīzī conceived of and, since we know that the idea for *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda* could only have been formulated around 816/1413, as his introduction to that text suggests, the inception of *al-Muqaffā* might thus be dated to a few years before that date. This conjecture would also help explain why al-Maqrīzī then abandoned the idea of writing about his contemporaries and acquaintances in Egypt in *al-Muqaffā*; it would also explain the significant slump in the number of biographies that appear there after the year 760/1359. When he started working on *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda*, he must have realized that there would be some redundancy, and when he accepted that he would not be able to complete *al-Muqaffā*, he abandoned the unnecessary duplication.

6 The Organization of the Biographical Dictionary

When editing *al-Muqaffā*, al-Yaʿlāwī followed the order in which the biographies now stand in the holographs and the apograph. We have established that the holographs represent only a small part of the text as it was left by al-Maqrīzī at his death and that these holographs were altered several times; some parts of other holographs of al-Maqrīzī's works were even mixed into *al-Muqaffā*. In such a situation, the apograph (MS Pertev Paşa 496) is the only true reflection of the text as it was composed by its author because it was produced in the decades following al-Maqrīzī's death. The apograph starts with the traditional *basmala*, followed by these words in red ink and large characters, like a title:

¹³² Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaffā* (1991 ed.) i, 45 = (2006 ed.) i, 32.

¹³³ This sentence is the last one in the biography and could be a later addition. Unfortunately, this passage only appears in the apograph (MS Pertev Paşa 496), making the verification of this hypothesis impossible because the copyist did not pay attention to physical characteristics in the holograph, like the position of an addition in the margin.

¹³⁴ See appendix 2, no. 3.

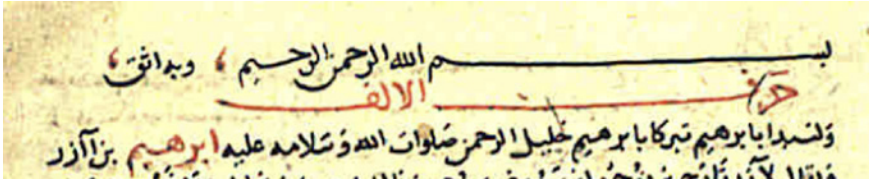


FIGURE 3.6 Incipit of MS Pertev Paşa 496 (Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi), fol. 1b

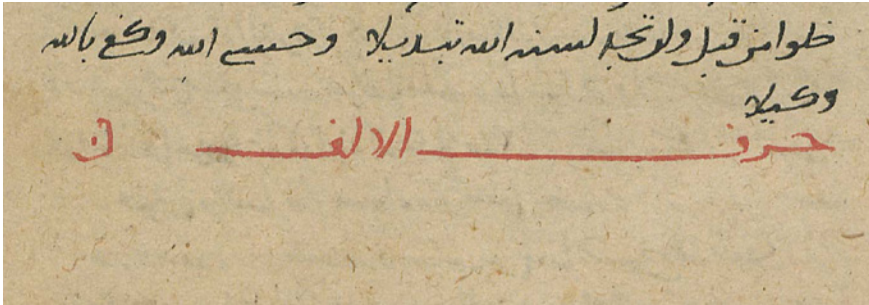


FIGURE 3.7 End of the introduction in *Durar al-‘uqūd al-farīda* (holograph) (Gotha, Forschungs- und Landesbibliothek, MS Or. 1771), fol. 2a

ḥarf al-alif. Beneath it, the text starts with ‘wa-l-nabda’ bi-Ibrāhīm tabarrukan bi-Ibrāhīm Khalīl al-Raḥmān’ (Let us start with [the name] Ibrāhīm, seeking blessings [of God] from Abraham the Compassionate’s friend; see fig. 3.6).

On the basis of this *incipit*, al-Ya’lāwī logically considered that al-Maqrīzī began *al-Muqaffā* with the letter *alif*. The text of *Durar al-‘uqūd al-farīda* might have strengthened his decision, as in the holograph of that text al-Maqrīzī indeed indicated, beneath the last words of his introduction, *ḥarf al-alif* (see fig. 3.7) that he followed the alphabetical order, i.e., from the first letter, *alif*, up to the last one, *yā’*.

As Sublet has shown, when the authors of biographical dictionaries did not respect the chronological order (by generation/*ṭabaqa*), they adopted the alphabetical order, but did not necessarily adhere to it strictly. While some, like Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282) in *Wafayāt al-a’yān* and Ibn Taghrī Birdī in *al-Manhal al-ṣāfi*, preferred a strict alphabetical order, others preferred to begin with the name of the Prophet (Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh), like al-Ṣafadī in *al-Wāfi bi-l-wafayāt*, or a name based on the same root, like Aḥmad.¹³⁵ In other cases, several systems were intermingled, as in the work of Ibn al-Faraḍī (d. 403/1012), who adopted three criteria (alphabetic, geographic, precedence)

¹³⁵ See Sublet, *Chroniques et ouvrages de biographies* 50–3.

and placed Ibrāhīm before Abān in order to give precedence to prophets' names.¹³⁶

In the absence of the author's introduction to *al-Muqaffā*, it is hard to be certain about the system al-Maqrīzī used, based only on the manuscripts. The apograph seems to prove that the biographies were alphabetically organized with precedence given to Ibrāhīm/Abraham, whose biography opens *al-Muqaffā*. The only way to tackle the issue of its organization is to consider the text itself and especially passages that might indicate the system the author adopted. One such passage concerns the biography of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's father—whose name was Muḥammad—where al-Maqrīzī specifies that his son's biography was yet to come.¹³⁷ In another biography, also concerning a Muḥammad (b. 'Abdallāh al-Ramlī), al-Maqrīzī notes that the biographies of his father ('Abdallāh) and his grandfather (Mujallī) would follow.¹³⁸ These two examples suffice to establish that al-Maqrīzī's *al-Muqaffā* began with the biographies of Muḥammads, then other names followed, according to a strict alphabetical order (*alif*, *bā'*, etc., up to *yā'*). In so doing, he conformed to his model, namely, Qutb al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī's biographical dictionary. As noted earlier, al-Ḥalabī had made a fair copy of four volumes corresponding to the beginning of his work, specifically the Muḥammads, a further proof that the work in question was more than just a source like any other and that al-Sakhāwī's claim that al-Maqrīzī heavily relied on it is fully justified. In any case, we can understand that the scribe who produced the apograph of *al-Muqaffā*, dealing as he was with several volumes with no introduction, assumed that the work was organized alphabetically. If he found Ibrāhīm's biography at the beginning of the volume containing the letter *alif*, it is likely that he assumed that the said biography constituted the right way to open the work, whether this beginning corresponded to the author's intention or not.

As for the inferior classification system—i.e., how the biographies are organized after the first name (*ism*) of any individual—, the manuscripts in their present state are not particularly helpful: the rebinding of the volumes, done in different periods, the mixing of material with some of al-Maqrīzī's other holographs, and the single leaves that have been misplaced, all contribute to

¹³⁶ Ibid. 54.

¹³⁷ Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaffā* (1991 ed.) v, 616 (no. 2184) = (2006 ed.) v, 329 (no. 2184): wa-sa-yudhkar in shā'a llāh fi tarjamat Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. This passage puzzled al-Ya'lāwī, who shared his perplexity in a footnote of the first edition; he indicated that al-Maqrīzī might have opted for the precedence of the name Muḥammad, like al-Ṣafādī did in *al-Wāfi*. He canceled this footnote in the second edition.

¹³⁸ Ibid. (1991 ed.) vi, 102 (no. 2542) = (2006 ed.) vi, 56–7 (no. 2542): wa-ya'ti in shā'a llāh dhikr abihi ['Abdallāh] wa-jaddihi [Mujallī].

mislead researchers attempting to draw any conclusion on the sole basis of the manuscripts in their present state.¹³⁹ In such a case, we proceed by considering a small part of the text and observe how al-Maqrīzī arranged the biographies on a single leaf. For instance, fol. 234 in MS Or. 1366c includes three biographies on the recto (the verso is blank) in the following order:

محمد بن يوسف بن يعقوب بن حفص ...
 محمد بن يوسف بن يعقوب بن محمد ...
 محمد بن يوسف بن يعقوب بن مهدي ...

The three biographies are clearly arranged in the alphabetical order of the second name (*ism*), then the third, followed by the fourth, etc. Al-Maqrīzī could not have organized these so precisely unless he was making a fair copy of these biographies from a draft; the text is written with the same ink, the color does not vary, the handwriting shows no variation, for instance, due to age, and there is no blank space between these biographies that would indicate that any were added later on.¹⁴⁰ A closer look at a longer list of ensuing names helps us to understand how al-Maqrīzī organized his classification system, particularly in cases where only a limited number of ancestors were known to him.

As table 3.3 shows,¹⁴¹ al-Maqrīzī adhered strictly to the alphabetical classification system as far back as possible, based on the number of ancestors he knew of; if he did not know the names of the ancestors, he placed the name at the end.¹⁴² It also reveals that he sorted teknonyms (*kunyas*) used as a name (*ism*) (e.g., Abū Bakr) according to the first letter of the second part of the teknonym: hence Abū Bakr (*bā'*) comes after Aḥmad and before al-Khiḍr (nos. 5–7). More interestingly, in cases where the names of the ancestors could not be provided, because al-Maqrīzī ignored them, as evidenced by a blank space, or

139 In her study on *al-Muqaffā*, Zaydān, Manhaj al-Maqrīzī 212–6, relied only on the 1991 edition. Consequently, her conclusions on the classification system adopted by al-Maqrīzī should not be taken into consideration (ibid. 216: “wa-hākadhā idhā tatabba'nā kull tarājim al-Muqaffā waqafnā 'alā 'adm murā'āt al-Maqrīzī li-manhaj wāhid”).

140 On this issue of the manuscripts that are fair copies, see the next section.

141 It is worth stressing here that all the biographies covering fols. 235a–242b in MS Or. 1366c once again correspond to the process of making fair copies (same color of ink, no cancellations, same handwriting, limited later additions in the margins). In some cases, al-Maqrīzī left some blank space between two biographies, perhaps to allow for the insertion of new biographies later.

142 Al-Maqrīzī seems to have broken the rule he set in only one case: no. 18 should have preceded no. 17. Such an error, rather limited in the sample analyzed, might be attributed to absentmindedness.

TABLE 3.3 List of subsequent names in MS Or. 1366c, fols. 235a–242b

1	محمد بن يوسف بن إبراهيم بن داود ...	14	محمد بن يوسف بن عبد المعطي ...
2	محمد بن يوسف بن إبراهيم بن عبد الرحمن ...	15	محمد بن يوسف بن علي بن خلف ...
3	محمد بن يوسف بن أحمد بن يوسف ...	16	محمد بن يوسف بن علي بن محمد ...
4	محمد بن يوسف بن أحمد أبو الحسن ...	17	محمد بن يوسف بن علي بن يوسف بن علي ...
5	محمد بن يوسف بن أبي بكر بن أحمد ...	18	محمد بن يوسف بن علي بن يوسف بن حيان ...
6	محمد بن يوسف بن أبي بكر بن هبة الله ...	19	محمد بن يوسف بن غنيم ...
7	محمد بن يوسف بن أبي بكر ضياء الدين ...	20	محمد بن يوسف بن محمد بن إبراهيم ...
8	محمد بن يوسف بن الخضر ...	21	محمد بن يوسف بن محمد بن الجنيد ...
9	محمد بن يوسف بن زيري ...	22	محمد بن يوسف بن محمد بن علي بن أحمد ...
10	محمد بن يوسف بن سالم ...	23	محمد بن يوسف بن محمد بن علي بن يوسف ...
11	محمد بن يوسف بن سعادة ...	24	محمد بن يوسف بن محمد بن أبي الفتوح ...
12	محمد بن يوسف بن عبد الرحمن ...	25	محمد بن يوسف بن محمد بن أبي المجد ...
13	محمد بن يوسف بن عبد الغني ...	26	محمد بن يوسف بن محمد بن أبي يداس ...

he wanted to stop at that point of the genealogy, he sorted those biographies at the end of the other biographies with the same sequence of names (see nos. 4 and 7). The same system is applied to names for which, at some point in the sequence, an ancestor is only known by his *kunya* (nos. 24–6): these are placed at the end of the sequence Muḥammad b. Yūsuf b. Muḥammad. When he reached the Muḥammad b. Yūnus sequence, al-Maqrīzī classed after it all the biographies of Muḥammads without the names of fathers, grandfathers, and ancestors. In most cases, he just wrote “Muḥammad b.,” leaving a blank space before writing the family name (*nisba*). His classification system thus appears to have been applied rather strictly.

In this respect, a final issue arises: the differentiation between biographies of men and women. In his *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda*, al-Maqrīzī devoted some biographies to women of his time.¹⁴³ In their present form, the extant manuscripts

143 To be precise, 52 (3 Asmā's, 1 Tatar, 1 Tujjār, 1 Juwayriyya, 7 Khadījas, 3 Ruqayyas, 6 Zaynabs, 1 Sāra, 3 Sitts, 1 Sittita, 1 Safrā, 1 Shams al-Mulūk, 1 Ṣafīyya, 9 ʿĀishas, 10 Fāṭimas, 1 Kulthūm, 1 Maryam, and 1 Malika), from a total of 1,473 biographies, i.e., 3.53 percent.

of *al-Muqaffā* also include nine biographies of women (seven Khadījas, one Kulthūm, and one Malika), an infinitesimal number in comparison with the total number of 3,561 preserved biographies. These female biographees all died between 777/1375–6 and 805/1402–3, which means they fall within the purview of *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda*, from which they were taken word for word.¹⁴⁴ In the case of the seven Khadījas, all of them appear on one folio and their biographies appear in exactly the same order as they do in *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda*. Another element that proves that these biographies never belonged to *al-Muqaffā* lies in the fact that they were not copied by the scribe of the apograph (MS Pertev Paşa 497); this is a further indication that parts from some

¹⁴⁴ MS Or. 14533, fol. 548a–b:

	<i>al-Muqaffā</i> (2006 ed.)	= <i>Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda</i>
Khadīja (d. 777)	iii, 422–3 (no. 1363/4)	ii, 54–5 (no. 437)
Khadīja (d. 779)	iii, 422 (no. 1363/3)	ii, 55–6 (no. 438)
Khadīja (d. 803)	iii, 422 (no. 1363/2)	ii, 56 (no. 439)
Khadīja (d. 803)	iii, 423 (no. 1363/5)	ii, 56 (no. 440)
Khadīja (d. 801)	iii, 423 (no. 1363/6)	ii, 56 (no. 441)
Khadīja (d. 803)	iii, 424 (no. 1363/7)	ii, 56–7 (no. 442)
Khadīja (d. 800)	iii, 424 (no. 1363/8)	ii, 57 (no. 443)

What follows (fols. 549–50)—corresponding to the end of the manuscript—is the biography of Khalaf, ruler of Gulbargā, who also belongs to *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda* (ii, 57–61, no. 444).

MS Or. 1366a, fol. 17 (slip of paper):

	<i>al-Muqaffā</i> (2006 ed.)	= <i>Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda</i>
Kulthūm (d. 805)	v, 7 (no. 1562)	iii, 24 (no. 910)

fol. 30b:

	<i>al-Muqaffā</i> (2006 ed.)	= <i>Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda</i>
Malika (d. 802)	v, 33 (no. 1572)	iii, 419 (no. 1364).

Both biographies are found in the 30 fols. at the beginning of the manuscript that have different origins: al-Maqrīzī's collection of opuscles, biographies from *al-Muqaffā* (mainly *alif*, while this volume starts, on fol. 31a, with the Muḥammads), and *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda*.

of al-Maqrīzī's other manuscripts were mixed up, and this took place after that apograph was produced, i.e., in the late ninth/fifteenth century at the earliest.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, some cross references indicate that al-Maqrīzī did plan to include biographies of women in *al-Muqaffā*. When speaking of the Fāṭimid caliph 'Ubaydallāh al-Mahdī (r. 297–322/909–34), al-Maqrīzī notes that the caliph had eight daughters; he mentions the names of four of them, and adds that they were all already mentioned in the book.¹⁴⁶ The way al-Maqrīzī expresses this indicates that he had already composed those biographies. Given that *al-Muqaffā*, in the form it has been preserved, does not contain a single biography of a woman, we can infer that al-Maqrīzī relegated them to a special section at the end of the book, as other authors before and after him did.¹⁴⁷ By contrast, in *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda*, he followed a system in which women's biographies appear with those of men, according to the alphabetical order.

7 What Is the True Nature of *al-Muqaffā*?

In a recent study on *al-Muqaffā*, Witkam advanced, first, that it was not a book in al-Maqrīzī's time,¹⁴⁸ in the sense that the preserved manuscripts should be considered a "master file on persons, which he could use as a reference for his other historical works,"¹⁴⁹ and second, that al-Maqrīzī later "abandoned the idea of completing" it.¹⁵⁰

The first statement is rather provocative and thought provoking, and leads us to ask, what makes a literary work a book? In terms of theoretical studies on authorship and authorial manuscripts in early modern Europe, Roger Chartier, inspired by Foucault's reflections on the subject, considers literary archives,¹⁵¹ which started to appear in Europe from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, part of an author's output.¹⁵² Chartier and Foucault were concerned that these literary archives be regarded as part of an author's work in their own right.

145 See above, 73–4.

146 *al-Muqaffā* (1991 ed.), iv, 565 = (2006 ed.) iv, 312 (wa-qad dhukirna fī hādihā l-kitāb).

147 For instance, al-Fāṣī, in his *al-ʿIqd al-thamīn fī tārikh al-balad al-amīn* and al-Sakhāwī in his *al-Ḍawʿ al-lāmiʿ*.

148 Witkam, Reflections 98.

149 Ibid. 100. In his 1994 article, he opted for a totally different viewpoint; he considered the holograph manuscripts of *al-Muqaffā* to be a fair copy (*tabyīda*). See Witkam, *Les Autographes* 93.

150 Witkam, Reflections 98.

151 Literary archives typically include drafts, fair copies, notebooks, reading notes, correspondence, etc.

152 Chartier, *From the author's hand* 12–5.

I will refrain from making generalizations, even for the Islamic world, as this is not the subject of this essay. Elsewhere I have presented some arguments that a work, even if it is unfinished, was the intellectual property of its creator if the author and others considered it a book.¹⁵³ Al-Silafi's (d. 576/1180) *Mu'jam al-safar* is a case in point. Al-Sakhāwī says the following about it:

ومعجم السفر للسلفي وهو في مجلد كثير الفوائد بخط محمد بن المنذري قال عن أبيه الزكي انه وقع له بخط السلفي في جزازات كل ترجمة في جزارة فيضها ورتبها كما تليء لا كما يجب وكذا لم يكن ترتيبه كما ينبغي.¹⁵⁴

Al-Silafi's *Mu'jam al-safar*:¹⁵⁵ This volume, full of useful notes, is in the handwriting of Muḥammad b. al-Mundhirī [d. 644/1246] who reported from his father, al-Zakī [ʿAbd al-ʿAzīm b. ʿAbd al-Qawī, d. 656/1258], that it came into his ownership in the shape of slips (*juzāzāt*) in al-Silafi's hand, each biography being on a slip, that he prepared a fair copy of them in the order in which they were, not as they should have been. For this [reason], its arrangement is not as it should be.

The description of the state in which al-Silafi left his biographical dictionary definitely tallies with what one would typically call a draft: it consisted of unbound single slips, each slip containing one biography. This system allowed the author to organize the slips as the work progressively expanded and the single slip permitted him to add material if he found new data. Their owner later copied these slips as they stood. In so doing, he contributed to the publication of al-Silafi's work, which later scholars regarded as al-Silafi's book.

From this perspective, al-Maqrīzī's notebooks, drafts, résumés, marginal notes in someone else's manuscripts—his literary archive—are undeniably part of his work. However, in the case of *al-Muqaffā*, we face a somewhat different situation: external and internal evidence, as well as cross references, show that this work was much more than a draft like al-Silafi's *Mu'jam al-safar*. Among the several external elements that substantiate this argument, we know that the major part of the manuscripts was made of quires, not slips, and that these quires are the result of a fair copying process.¹⁵⁶ This is corroborated

¹⁵³ This issue has been tackled *en passant* in Bauden, Maqriziana IX 200–1.

¹⁵⁴ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Iʿlān* 211 = trans. Rosenthal 441 (I have amended his translation slightly).

¹⁵⁵ A biographical dictionary of authorities he met during his travels.

¹⁵⁶ Witkam, *Reflections* 100, is of the opinion that the manuscripts of *al-Muqaffā* were made of loose leaves that al-Maqrīzī could move as cards in case of necessity, like al-Silafi. As

by the features presented earlier: the color of the ink, the hand, and the classification system of the biographies. We can identify a further proof, namely, that al-Maqrīzī inserted a new biography using slips or quires made of a different paper in a different size, so that he could paste in the quire where the biography belonged.¹⁵⁷ Most of the slips are made of reused chancery documents; it has been established that he used fewer of these than in his other holograph manuscripts (drafts, notebooks, and résumés); this indicates that the manuscript of *al-Muqaffā* has a different status, it is a fair copy.¹⁵⁸ The quires remained unbound until his death because of their intrinsic link to the nature of the book: al-Maqrīzī constantly improved, emended, and made additions to his text.¹⁵⁹ Unbound quires enabled him to move one biography covering several leaves to another place in the dictionary, by simply detaching them and pasting them in the right place in another quire. For example, he did this when he discovered that the name of the biographee or that of his father was wrong. The biography of the first ‘Abbāsīd caliph in Cairo, al-Mustanṣir Aḥmad (r. 659–660 to 661/1261 to 1262), which appears in MS Or. 14533, fols. 51a–53b, offers a compelling example. The last leaf, fol. 53a, starts with the word *al-jihāz*,

evidence of this system, he refers to an example (ibid. 114) where al-Maqrīzī wrote over the names of the biographee the same names with the letters separated, i.e.,

ح س ي ن ح س ن

for Ḥusayn and Ḥasan. Witkam surmised that al-Maqrīzī used this to help him maintain the alphabetical order. But if this were the case, the system would have been applied by al-Maqrīzī for each biography, but it only appears in a very limited number of cases (I counted only two). In fact, that person was named al-Ḥusayn b. al-Ḥasan b. al-Ḥusayn b. al-Ḥasan. The reason behind these separated letters is linked to al-Maqrīzī's wish to confirm that the names written in full just below were correct (both names al-Ḥusayn and al-Ḥasan could be mistaken by copyists if they did not pay attention). The other case regards the Turkish name Aṭsız (MS Or. 14533, fol. 189a): al-Maqrīzī avoids any potential confusion by writing the separate letters above the name

(ا ط س ز).

157 The holographs of al-Ṣafadī's *al-Wāfi* share the same features. See, for instance, MS 3196 (Nuruosmaniye Kütüphanesi, Istanbul).

158 For the reused chancery documents, see above, 93–4. I counted 327 inserts (out of 1,577 leaves, i.e., 20.73 percent) either slips or leaves composing a full quire, in the five manuscripts (respectively MS Or. 1366a: 58, MS Or. 1366c: 32, MS Or. 3075: 72, MS 14533: 87, MS Ar. 2144: 78). Of these 327 inserts, 65 bear chancery inscriptions. In comparison with the first version of the *Khīṭaṭ* (MS Hazine 1472 and Emanet Hazinesi 1405), which contains 158 and 177 chancery fragments, respectively, out of 179 and 182 leaves, this is an insignificant number. For the list of chancery fragments in al-Maqrīzī's holograph manuscripts, see Bauden, *Diplomatic entanglements* 412.

159 The manuscripts of his other texts also remained unbound for the same reason. He most certainly used a cover to protect the volume and keep the quires in the right order.

and the remainder of the text found on this leaf tallies exactly with a text found on fol. 16a ending at the top of fol. 16b.¹⁶⁰ There, the text is unconnected to what precedes it, and al-Maqrīzī canceled it using a cipher, by which he meant “copied” (*nuqila*) (see fig. 3.8).¹⁶¹ This feature shows that al-Maqrīzī needed to move the whole biography from one quire to another. However, he could do this for the first two leaves only, the last one had to remain in its place because it contained, on the verso, the beginning of a new biography that covers the subsequent leaves. This compelled him to cancel the remainder of the biography, which he moved and wrote anew on a new leaf (fol. 53). This example further confirms that al-Maqrīzī had already made a fair copy of most of *al-Muqaffā*, i.e., all the parts that are written on quires of the same kind of paper that constitute the majority of the holograph volumes preserved.¹⁶²

Internal evidence also supports the argument that the text found in the manuscripts of *al-Muqaffā* corresponds to the outcome of a final literary process, as its biographies are the result of a composition involving several stages (reading of sources, first stage of redaction or draft) and are not just résumés of other sources to which he would have added data found elsewhere, later. The analysis of one biography of an eighth-/fourteenth-century amir named Almās reveals that al-Maqrīzī relied heavily on the material he found in al-Ṣafadī's *al-Wāfi bi-l-wafayāt*.¹⁶³ The preparatory stage can thus be summarized: (1) the résumé he made of al-Ṣafadī's *al-Wāfi* can be found in his notebook, now in Liège, where this specific biography appears.¹⁶⁴ (2) Nevertheless, in this biography in *al-Muqaffā*, we find additional data stemming from another of al-Ṣafadī's works (*Aḡyān al-aṣr*) and al-Yūsufī's (d. 759/1358) *Nuzhat al-nāzir*. (3) Using his résumé of *al-Wāfi* as a framework, al-Maqrīzī built his own text, in the next redaction stage, with the help of these two additional sources.¹⁶⁵ (4) The draft was then made into a fair copy in *al-Muqaffā*, as it stands now. This evidence can hardly be reconciled with the idea that *al-Muqaffā* was a draft. In fact, the whole issue arises because the boundary between a draft and a fair copy is blurry. In the case of al-Maqrīzī, and most authors of his time, a

160 Leaf 16a also starts with the word *al-jihāz*.

161 On this sign, which can also be noted in some of his other holographs, see Bauden, Maqriziana II 109–12.

162 In this respect, note that al-Maqrīzī used catchwords for biographies whose text covered more than one folio. This helped him keep the internal structure of the quires in good order, a critical necessity given that they were unbound. The same system can be observed in the holograph of his *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda* (Gotha, MS. Or. A1771).

163 Al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi* ix, 370–1 (no. 4296).

164 Liège Université, Bibliothèque d'Architecture, Lettres, Philosophie, Histoire et Arts, MS 2232, fol. 93a.

165 On this analysis, see Bauden Maqriziana XI.

book remained a draft until there was a fair copy of it, meaning, it was a draft until he reached a certain level of satisfaction with the result of his work. Once the clean copy was ready, he could still work on it, and improve the text as he discovered new sources. The clean copy itself thus became a draft until a new fair copy was produced. In some cases, this stage was never reached. In this respect, the issue of publication (i.e., making it public) is of course pivotal: a fair copy that was distributed and copied, that is, published by its author, contained all the elements that make up a text (title, introduction, internal references). On the other hand, a fair copy of a work still in progress was only meant to serve the author for its future development. While it is obvious that in the latter case the author intended to enlarge the fair copy in view of a future publication, we must stress that even in the former case, the author was still free to amend his already published text, though with less oversight of the version(s) that was already in circulation.¹⁶⁶ The holograph of the first volume of al-Maqrīzī's *al-Sulūk* contains the same text (years 567–703) that was copied by scribes after his death and that is found in all the available copies. As such, it reflects the version that al-Maqrīzī established and wanted to see published. Initially, it looks like a fair copy: it has a title page, introduction, continuous text, the same ink, the same paper, and the same hand. Notwithstanding this, the manuscript contains numerous additions in the margins and on slips, sometimes full quires of a paper of smaller size, and other indications that al-Maqrīzī was involved in ongoing editing. As for *al-Muqaffā*, al-Maqrīzī continued to expand upon what amounted to the clean copy. Despite this, it is not regarded as a draft, but as the version that al-Maqrīzī wanted to see published.¹⁶⁷ We should look at *al-Muqaffā* in just the same way, as a fair copy with later additions. Thus, it was an unfinished work that was published *post mortem*, once the apograph was produced.

The cross references al-Maqrīzī continuously made to *al-Muqaffā* in his other books further substantiate this assertion. Even though *al-Muqaffā* was an ongoing project, he considered it part of his output and a book in its own

166 This process was quite common for works written before the age of printing and explains the authorial variants that are sometimes noticed in copies. For Islam, see Rosenthal, *The technique* 30; for European authors, see Cerquiglini, *In praise of the variant*. That authors tried to oversee a published version of their text is attested. Ibn Ḥajar, for instance, wrote to several disciples in Syria who were circulating one of his works, and requested that they cancel a given passage because he had discovered that the passage was based on data provided by an unreliable source. See Bauden, *Maqriziana* xvii.

167 The existence of a draft preceding the state of the text as it stands in the present manuscripts is clear from the fact that al-Maqrīzī could indicate that he had already devoted a biography to one of the biographee's relatives or that it was forthcoming.

right. On one occasion, in *al-Sulūk*, he even invited the reader to check the biography of St. Mark in *al-Muqaffā* under the letter *mīm*;¹⁶⁸ he indicated by this that he conceived of *al-Muqaffā* as a book that was meant to be published (i.e., generally made known and consulted). Furthermore, a section of one of his notebooks preserved in Alexandria, datable to after 831/1428, shows that he was still taking note of names that he needed to add to *al-Muqaffā*, which he later did.¹⁶⁹ As late as 837/1433, i.e., nine years before his death, he referred to it in a treatise he composed at the time.¹⁷⁰

The evidence presented above indicates that al-Maqrīzī truly considered *al-Muqaffā* a full-fledged book, based on a project he never abandoned. Ultimately, he realized that he would not be able to reach the goal he had set at the time of its conception. This is what he expressed before his death, when he said that he only managed to complete sixteen volumes, though he had collected enough material to fill more than eighty. Despite the unfortunate reality that he could not finish it, the sixteen volumes were part of his legacy. Of course, he was fully aware that these volumes would be perused by his contemporaries and by later generations, just as he had used sources, including a fair copy of Quṭb al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī's biographical dictionary, which was, for the most part, still in draft form at the time of al-Ḥalabī's death. The fortunes of those sixteen volumes testify that this was the case.¹⁷¹

8 Conclusion

The thorough perusal of the material witnesses (drafts, fair copies, notebooks, résumés, notes of consultation) of al-Maqrīzī's intellectual output and of the copies that were made thereof offers a unique insight into his activity as a scholar. Not only does it reveal unknown aspects of his activity, but it also confirms testimonies transmitted by contemporary scholars whose contentions would otherwise remain obscure. Al-Sakhāwī's claim that al-Maqrīzī benefited

168 Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Sulūk* iv, 505 (wa-qad iqtashaṣtu fī *Tārīkh Miṣr al-kabīr al-muqaffā* akhbār al-Murqūṣ ḥādhā fa-nzurhu fī ḥarf al-mīm tajidhu). This biography is now missing in the manuscripts.

169 See appendix 1. The presence of the cipher *nuqila* (i.e., copied) confirms that the biographies were indeed transferred in *al-Muqaffā*, where some of these were identified in the preserved manuscripts.

170 See Bauden, *al-Maqrīzī's collection*, chapter 2.

171 The history of the text, and its copies, after al-Maqrīzī's death appears in the second part of this study: Maqriziana x: al-Maqrīzī and his *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr al-muqaffā li-Miṣr*. Part 2: The fortunes of the work and of its copies.

greatly from the work of one of his predecessors, Quṭb al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī, was no less detrimental to al-Maqrīzī than al-Sakhāwī's charge of plagiarism in relation to the *Khīṭaṭ*. In the absence of evidence, it is inconceivable that we should give credence to such repetitive allegations. In this study, I have brought forward a wide array of evidence indicating that al-Maqrīzī indeed relied heavily on Quṭb al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī's biographical dictionary; among these signs are the identification of summarized biographies from al-Ḥalabī's work in al-Maqrīzī's notebook. Moreover, hints singled out in al-Maqrīzī's *al-Muqaffā* and other works provide instructive indications that al-Ḥalabī inspired al-Maqrīzī in more ways than one: he adopted an almost similar title under which Quṭb al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī's biographical dictionary was known; he embraced the same classification system (giving precedence to the Muḥammads before proceeding with the normal alphabetical order); and he took on a similar scope (biographies of Egyptians). All these elements demonstrate, once again, that al-Sakhāwī's claim was not entirely false, though he was wrong when he said that al-Maqrīzī did not quote Quṭb al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī even once. As in the case of the *Khīṭaṭ*, al-Maqrīzī obviously expanded on his predecessor's work; he composed a book, *al-Muqaffā*, that became his own work, thanks to a variety of authorial interventions, like the addition of new data and material and the selection of the biographies he included.

The analysis in these pages has also yielded engaging results regarding al-Maqrīzī's program as an author, the relation between *al-Muqaffā* and his various works—particularly the aim of his biographical dictionary—as well as the nature of the manuscripts containing the text. We can now suggest that *al-Muqaffā* was conceived as a supplement (hence the meaning of the word *al-muqaffā*) to his various works—the *Khīṭaṭ*, the historical trilogy, some of his opuscles—which explains the numerous cross references he made to it in these books. The opinion that the holograph manuscripts corresponded to al-Maqrīzī's biographical master file composed of loose leaves—a kind of card index—is definitely at odds with the evidence it purports to present. This evidence includes the textual analysis of biographies; the physical examination of the manuscripts; and material evidence, like the color of the ink, the aspect of the handwriting, and the position of the text on the page, which all point to the process he was engaged in, namely, of making a fair copy. Over time, al-Maqrīzī evidently revised and emended his text (authorial revisions), just as he did for the fair copies of all of his other works.

Before and after al-Maqrīzī's death, *al-Muqaffā* drew the attention of his friends, colleagues, students, and generations of scholars who contributed to shape the text as it stands now. They added biographies and notes, made corrections and comments, exploited and quoted passages. Thus, with the passing

of time, al-Maqrīzī's text was appropriated by readers and owners and evolved independently from its author's will. The manuscripts constitute the undeniable witness that an author's text must be considered by the yardstick of its evolution after his death. The watershed is al-Maqrīzī's death, when his vision of his work came to an end. This statement raises issues about making critical editions and the standards scholars should apply to such an enterprise. In both his attempts to publish *al-Muqaffā*, al-Ya'lawī ignored these paratextual elements, and completely reorganized the whole biographical dictionary. His editions clearly reflect the actual state of the manuscripts and, as such, can in no way be regarded as a faithful reproduction of the text that was composed by al-Maqrīzī. Consequently, it is even more necessary to produce a critical edition (and English translation) that takes into consideration all the transformations the manuscripts of *al-Muqaffā* went through after al-Maqrīzī's death.

Appendix 1

Biographies al-Maqrīzī noted in some of his holograph manuscripts to indicate necessary additions to *al-Muqaffā*¹⁷²

Alexandria, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, MS Tārīkh 165
fol. 1a:

يكتب في التاريخ الكبير إن شاء الله
عبد الله بن علي بن عيسى الوزير
أبو الحسين الواصي المفسر
الحسن بن رشيق العسكري المحدث
أبو محمد بن أبي الطيب
موسى بن الحسن بن أبي الحسين أبو الفتوح
أبو عبد الله المغازلي
زهير اللؤلؤي
عبد العزيز بن أعين الفارض أبو القاسم

¹⁷² If the biography appears in the preserved manuscripts, the reference is to the 2006 edition of *al-Muqaffā*.



FIGURE 3.8 The end of a biography that al-Maqrīzī canceled by using vertical strokes, the central one corresponding to the cipher نقل

LEIDEN, UNIVERSITEITSBIBLIOTHEEK, MS OR. 14533, FOL. 16A

إبراهيم بن عياش
 أبو بكر النعال الفقيه
 علي بن الشيوخ الشريف أبو الحسن
 جعفر بن علي بن النعمان
 عبد الرحمن بن حسين بن مهذب
 مجير بن تميم أبو الفتوح
 إبراهيم بن يوسف بن كلثوم أخو الوزير (= المقفى، ج ١، ص ٢٠٤، رقم ٣٩٥)

fol. 5b:

يكتب إن شاء الله في التاريخ الكبير عند تحريره
 إبراهيم بن إسماعيل بن جعفر بن مسلم الحسيني (= المقفى، ج ١، ص ٦٧، رقم ٥٧)
 جعفر بن شاذان النحوي أبو القاسم
 أبو بكر بن بطريق
 طعج بن جف الفرغاني أمير دمشق (= المقفى، ج ٤، ص ١٦، رقم ١٤١٤)
 هاشم بن إلياس بن عبيد الله المهدي
 طولون بن خمارويه بن أحمد بن طولون
 تركان شاه بن يلدكوش التركي ناصر الجيوش (= المقفى، ج ٢، ص ٣٤٠، رقم ١٠٢٦)
 رقيب بن علي عازم الدولة
 المقوقس بن قرقب اليوناني

Damascus, Maktabat al-Asad, MS 4805

fol. 67a:

يكتب في التاريخ إن شاء الله
 ديف بن راشد مولى يزيد بن المهلب بن أبي صقرة

Appendix 2

References to biographies in *al-Muqaffā* made by al-Maqrīzī in his other works¹⁷³

1. *al-Dhahab al-masbūk*¹⁷⁴

- p. 233 (‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān and Marwān b. al-Ḥakam)
كما قد ذكرت ترجمته وترجمة أبيه في التاريخ الكبير لمصر، فإنهما دخلاها
- p. 283 (al-Ma’mūn)
وقد ذكرت خبر ذلك مبسوطا في ترجمة المأمون من تاريخ مصر الكبير المقفى.
- p. 321 (al-Malik al-Mu‘azzam Shams al-Dawla Tūrān Shāh¹⁷⁵)
وقد ذكرت ترجمته مبسوطا في كتاب المواعظ والاعتبارات بذكر الخطط والآثار وفي كتاب التاريخ الكبير المقفى لمصر.
- p. 329 (al-Malik al-Mu‘azzam ‘Īsā)
وقد ذكرت ترجمته مستوفاة في التاريخ الكبير المقفى لمصر.
- p. 335 (al-Malik al-Mas‘ūd Yūsuf)
وقد استوفيت أخباره في تاريخ مصر المقفى.
- p. 343 (al-Malik al-Nāṣir Dāwūd)
وكانت له قصص وأنباء ذكرت في التاريخ الكبير المقفى.
- p. 351 (al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Baybars)
ولذلك خبر طويل قد ذكرته في ترجمته من كتاب التاريخ الكبير المقفى وكتاب أخبار ملوك مصر.

¹⁷³ If the biography appears in the preserved manuscripts, the reference is to the 2006 edition of *al-Muqaffā*.

¹⁷⁴ Reference is made to Van Steenbergen's edition in his *Caliphate and kingship*.

¹⁷⁵ Not to be confused with al-Malik al-Mu‘azzam Tūrān Shāh, the last Ayyūbid sultan of Egypt, whose biography has been preserved. See *al-Muqaffā* (2006 ed.) ii, 361–5.

2. *Dhikr mā warada fī Banī Umayya wa-Banī l-‘Abbās*¹⁷⁶

- fol. 10a (‘Abdallāh b. ‘Abbās)

وقد آتيت على أخبار عبد الله بن عباس رضي الله عنه في كتاب التاريخ الكبير المقفى (=المقفى، ج ٤، ص ٢٧١-٨٩، رقم ١٥٢٧)

3. *Durar al-‘uqūd al-farīda fī tarājīm al-a‘yān al-mufīda*

- ii, 238 (Aḥmad b. Uways)

وحدثني [عبد الرحيم بن نجيب البغدادى] عن قدوم تمرلنك إلى بغداد وفرار السلطان أحمد بن أويس منه بما أثبتته في ترجمته من كتاب التاريخ الكبير المقفى.

- iii, 17 (Faṭḥ Allāh b. Mu‘taṣim b. Nafīs al-Tibrīzī)

وذكرته في كتاب التاريخ الكبير المقفى.

- iii, 498 (Mansā Mūsā)

كما ذكرته في ترجمته من كتاب التاريخ الكبير المقفى.

- iii, 512 (Nu‘ayr/Muḥammad b. Ḥiyār b. Muḥannā)

ثم كان له [مهنا بن عيسى] مع السلطان الملك الناصر محمد بن قلاوون أبناء وقصص قد ذكرتها سنة اثنتي عشرة في ترجمته من التاريخ الكبير المقفى.

4. *al-Mawā‘iẓ wa-l-‘tibār fī dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa-l-āthār*

- iii, 98(16) (‘Umar b. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ḥammūya’s sons)

وقد ذكرت أولاد شيخ الشيوخ في كتاب تاريخ مصر الكبير واستقصيت فيه أخبارهم (ترجمة محمد فقط، المقفى، ج ٦، ص ٢٢٣-٤، رقم ٢٩١٠).

- iv, 436(11) (Ibn Saba’)

وابن سبأ هذا هو الذي أثار فتنة أمير المؤمنين عثمان بن عفان حتى قتل كما ذكر في ترجمة ابن سبأ من كتاب التاريخ الكبير المقفى.

- iv, 910(12) (al-Shāfi‘ī)

ومناقب الشافعي كثيرة قد صنف الأئمة فيها عدة مصنفات وله في تاريخي الكبير المقفى ترجمة كبيرة (المقفى، ج ٥، ص ١٦٩-٢٢٦، رقم ١٨٩٥)

¹⁷⁶ Reference is made to MS A.F. 342b (Vienna).

5. *al-Sulūk li-maʿrifat duwal al-mulūk*

- ii, 365 (Baktamur al-Sāqī)

وقد ذكرنا ترجمته في كتابنا الكبير المقفى بما فيه كفاية إذ هو كتاب تراجم ووفيات كما أن هذا كتاب حوادث وماجريات (المقفى، ج ٢، ص ٢٦٩–٧٢، رقم ٩٣٩)

- iii, 238 (Ashaqtimur)

وقال الأدباء في ذلك شعرا كثيرا ذكرنا بعضه في ترجمة الأمير أشقتمر من تاريخنا الكبير المقفا.

- iv, 129 (Yūsuf b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Bīrī)¹⁷⁷

وقد بسطت ترجمته في التاريخ الكبير المقفى وفي كتاب درر العقود الفريدة في تراجم الأعيان المفيدة هو وكل من له وفاة في هذا الجزء ويستحق بها أن يذكر إما بشهرته أو بفضيلته.

- iv, 505 (al-Murquṣ = Apostle Mark)

وقد اقتصصت في تاريخ مصر الكبير المقفى أخبار المرقص هذا فانظره في حرف الميم تجده.

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¹⁷⁷ His biography may indeed be found in *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda*, iii, 562–72, but not in *al-Muqaffā* in its present state.

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Bringing the Past Together: Ahmedi's Narrative of Ottoman History and Two Later Texts

Murat Cem Mengüç

Foreword

This essay was conceived as a comparative analysis of how the earliest written narrative of Ottoman history, which is found in Ahmedi's (c. 814/1412) *İskendername*, was later incorporated into two other Ottoman history books, namely, the anonymous *Tevarih-i Ali Osman* (c. 889/1485) and the 968/1561 edition of Neşri's *Cihannüma*. These incorporations, which are the only examples of their kind, deserve our attention for at least three reasons. First, modern scholarship has long argued that there existed two distinct narratives of Ottoman history and these remained separate until 1495, when Neşri combined them in the first edition of his *Cihannüma*. Yet, the quotations I analyze here suggest that a parallel narration of these two historical narratives was made roughly a decade before Neşri envisioned the combination. In other words, the desire to bring together the two narratives was probably not unique to Neşri and others had attempted the same. This means that both narratives were known to the literary elite such as Ahmedi and Neşri, and also to the general public, the most common audience of the anonymous *Tevarih-i Ali Osman* texts. Second, the quotations in Neşri's *Cihannüma* are found in its 968/1561 edition, which was produced long after his death. Therefore, in the present analysis I argue that they must be excluded from the discussions of Neşri's efforts to bring together the two narratives. Third, note that on both occasions, these quotations represent an ornamental style, a desire to introduce artistic/poetic elements into otherwise prose-based texts. They represent an attempt to enhance the simple Turkish language of the two texts. A final point concerns how previous scholarship viewed these quotes. As far as we know, the only reference to these quotations is found in Halil İnalcık's work, who identified their source as *Hamzaname*, which was composed by Ahmedi's brother Hamzavi (dates unknown). Unfortunately, İnalcık does not state on which manuscript he based his claims. In the present analysis I show that these quotations came directly from Ahmedi's work.

1 Ahmedî and His Narrative of Ottoman History

The Ottoman Empire came into existence at the turn of the eighth/fourteenth century, but, for Ottoman authors, the tradition of writing Ottoman history books emerged more than a century later. Until the empire experienced its first civil war (804–16/1402–13), known as *Fetret Devri*, and its existence was radically challenged, the composition of history books was limited to simple chronologies and short colorful reflections of current events. Sultan Bayezid I (r. 791–804/1389–1402) had expanded the Ottoman territories in Anatolia and attracted the wrath of the Anatolian Turkic lords; their anger was especially intense after Bayezid I re-allocated the governorships of these lands, a process during which he undermined the local power politics and upset numerous Anatolian Turkic notables. Their complaints found a sympathetic ear in Tīmūr (736–807/1336–1405), who was eager to invade, and thus extend the borders of Ottoman territories in the Middle East. As a result of the Turkic lords' pleas for help and his exchange of letters with Bayezid I, in which the latter used insulting language, Tīmūr resolved to invade Anatolia, to take over the newly acquired Ottoman territories in the region, and to return them to their original lords. On 19 Dhū l-Ḥijja 804/20 July 1402, Tīmūr's army and the Ottoman forces clashed at the legendary battle near Ankara, where the Ottomans were defeated. Bayezid I was betrayed by his Tatar allies and his Anatolian troops. According to some sources, he was also abandoned by his own children. At one point, he also broke away from his Janissary guards in a frenzy and charged against Tīmūr's army, was captured, and spent the last days of his life as a war trophy, locked in an iron-cage and paraded from town to town, until he committed suicide on 13 Sha'ban 805/8 March 1403.¹

After Bayezid's death, his five sons engaged in a civil war among themselves, until one of them, Süleyman Çelebi (778–813/1377–1411), became de facto ruler of the Anatolian territories of the empire, or what was left of it (from 808/1406 to 812/1410). Süleyman Çelebi was also the first member of the Ottoman dynasty to commission an Ottoman history.² The author he commissioned was Taceddin İbrahim b. Hıdır (730–815/1330–1413), who used the pen name Ahmedî. He was born around 730/1330 in Germiyan, initially "one of the strongest and most cultured successor-states of the Seljuk sultanate of Rum."³ He was an accomplished poet and a distinguished scholar who was educated

1 For a general depiction of the events of the period, see Kastritsis, *The sons*.

2 Ibid.

3 Ménage, A survey 59.

abroad, mainly in Egypt. His contemporaries included Şemseddin Muḥammad Fenari (d. 834/1431), later known as “a great theologian and scholar” and Celaleddin Khidr (d. 827–8/1424), known as Hacı Paşa, “a famous physician.”⁴ Upon his return to Anatolia, Ahmedi entered the Germiyan court where Süleyman Şah (r. 768–87/1367–86) became his patron. The Germiyan Şah was also the father-in-law of an Ottoman prince named Bayezid, later Bayezid I, the fourth Ottoman sultan. Süleyman Şah also introduced Ahmedi to Bayezid’s court, where Ahmedi became the mentor of Bayezid’s son, Süleyman Çelebi. As Süleyman Çelebi grew up, Ahmedi became more attached to the court and lived most of the rest of his life under this patron. Before his death, Ahmedi witnessed some of the most troubled years of the empire; it was during the *Fetret Devri* that he composed what became his masterpiece, *İskendername*. The evidence indicates that it was Bayezid who originally suggested to Ahmedi that he should translate the *İskendername* by Nizami Ganjavi into Turkish.⁵ Ultimately, Ahmedi took liberties with his paraphrasing and translation, and enriched his version to such an extent that the book became his own literary masterpiece.⁶

Ahmedi first completed his book in 812/1410 and dedicated its first copy to Süleyman Çelebi.⁷ However, during the same year, the supporters of Mehmed Çelebi (Süleyman Çelebi’s half-brother and rival for the throne) assassinated him.⁸ The event so closely followed the completion of *İskendername* that we are not sure if Süleyman Çelebi ever received a copy of Ahmedi’s work. After Süleyman Çelebi’s death, Ahmedi sought a new patron in Mehmed Çelebi, who had become the strongest contender for the Ottoman throne. In 814/1412, after eliminating all other heirs to the throne, Mehmed Çelebi became the fifth Ottoman sultan (Mehmed I).⁹ During the same year, Ahmedi dedicated a copy of the *İskendername* to him, presenting it to him personally. He seems to have gained Mehmed I’s favor, since a year after Ahmedi died his name was

4 Köprülü, Ahmedi 299–300; Babinger, *Osmanlı* 12–14; Ménage, A survey 59.

5 Fodor, Ahmedi’s Dāsitān 41.

6 Ahmedi, *İskendername* 9–23. These pages refer to Erünsal’s introduction, which contains the information given in this paragraph.

7 While traditional accounts relate that Ahmedi may have served in Tīmūr’s court as well, he seems to have remained loyal to Süleyman Çelebi throughout his life. Final versions of his *Cemşid ve Hurşid* and *Tarwih al-arwah* were also dedicated to Süleyman Çelebi. A further discussion of Ahmedi and his possible patrons can be found in Pal Fodor’s essay. See also Babinger, *Osmanlı* 12–4; Ménage, A survey 59 and Fodor, Ahmedi’s Dāsitān 41–54.

8 Zachariadou, Süleyman 290–1.

9 Ménage, A survey 60, 298, 299; Köprülü, Ahmedi 299–300.

registered as the holder of the title of *divan katibi* (court secretary) of Amasya; this confirms that he was in the service of the state before his retirement.¹⁰

With regard to Ottoman historiography, the most important feature of the *İskendername* is a chapter titled *Dastan ve Tevarihi Ali Osman*, commonly referred to as the *Dastan*. This chapter contains the oldest historical narrative of the Ottoman past. It encompasses a chronological summary of the major events, victories, and deeds of the early Ottoman rulers, starting from Ertuğrul (d. 687/1281), the father of Osman the founder the Ottoman dynasty, up to Mehmed I's accession to the throne. Like the rest of the *İskendername*, it was composed in verse. It was eulogistic and ruler-oriented, that is, it was composed in a colorful language of praise and mainly focuses on the activities of the Ottoman sultans.

During the later decades, the content of the *Dastan*, or at least a source directly related to it, served as the main reference for numerous historians. For example, the historian Şükrullah b. Şehabeddin Ahmed b. Zeyneddin Zeki (c. 789–869/1388–1465), whose work became the blueprint for Ottoman court historiography, followed Ahmedi's *Dastan*, at times word-for-word.¹¹ Mehmed b. Arif Çelebi (known as Karamani Nişancı Mehmed Paşa, and commonly referred to as Nişancı) (d. 885/1481)¹² and Mehmed b. Hacı Halil Al'Konevi (d. c. 889/1485) followed in the footsteps of Şükrullah and composed their own versions of the same court history.¹³ Moreover, these historians' careers were remarkably similar to that of Ahmedi; that is, they had good relations with the Ottoman court and the sultans of their time. The school of historiography that began with Ahmedi and continued with these authors lasted well into the late ninth/fifteenth century, until Neşri famously united it with another narrative tradition, as mentioned in the introduction.

1.1 *Another Narrative of Ottoman History*

The alternative historical narrative of the Ottomans that Neşri used also emerged prior to his career and, most likely, existed in oral form. While the earliest versions of its written form date to the 820s/1420s, its most original examples can be found in the pages of the anonymous *Tevarihi Ali Osman* (885/1485).¹⁴ Although six decades separate *Tevarihi Ali Osman* from its roots, this does not

10 Ménage, A survey 59; Köprülü, Ahmedi 299–300.

11 Ménage, A survey 98–9.

12 Ibid. 128–31.

13 Ibid. 102–4.

14 Ibid. 184.

tarnish its originality and reliability, since it represents the gradual transformation from an oral to a textual tradition over several decades. Unlike the work of Ahmedi and those who followed in his footsteps, *Tevarihi Ali Osman* is neither a palace-oriented nor a eulogistic text. For example, in contrast to Ahmedi's twelve lines about Osman's reign, *Tevarihi Ali Osman* narrates the period in twelve pages of prose. This extensive material offers many controversial details on the Ottoman dynasty, its servants, elites, and allies. A good example of these details is its explicit criticism of the *ulema* during Bayezid's reign, which I have analyzed in a previous essay¹⁵ but also summarize below. Also, in contrast to Şükrullah and Al'Konevi's colorful Persian text and Nişancı's work in classical Arabic, the *Tevarihi Ali Osman* was composed in vernacular Turkish. The use of vernacular language in this context suggests that the *Tevarihi Ali Osman* represents a less elitist literary tradition. We know that the Ottoman court at the time deemed Persian and Arabic as the ideal languages of scientific and artistic expression, and considered Turkish, at least according to one contemporary author, a "headache."¹⁶ Yet, because of its critical and expanded content and simple language, *Tevarihi Ali Osman* was by far the most popular Ottoman history of the period.¹⁷ As such, the modern scholar, V.L. Ménage, classified *Tevarihi Ali Osman* and other works written in the same vein as the work of "humble and obscure men, whose sympathies are with the common people rather than the statesmen of the court, and whose deeply-felt but naïve religious beliefs reflect not only the austere theology of the *medreses*, but the popular Islam of the dervish *tekkes*."¹⁸ Its popularity must have been one of the main reasons *Tevarihi Ali Osman* became—among the Ottoman historians representing the Turkish-speaking, educated elite, such as Aşıkpaşazade (803–907/1401–1502), Oruç (c. 905/1500), and Neşri (c. 885/1481)—the most influential historical source with regard to the origins of the Ottomans.

The *Tevarihi Ali Osman* seems to have enjoyed its highest degree of popularity around the late 880s/1480s, a period from which we have at least nine surviving copies. Interestingly, this was also when Ahmedi's *İskendernâme* enjoyed a revitalization; of the sixty-seven recorded copies, at least eleven were composed between 1460 and 1490.¹⁹ This coincidence most likely indicates that Ottoman historiography was gaining a greater momentum in this interval,

15 Mengüç, *Histories* 373–89.

16 Kemalpaşazade, *Selatinname* 206–7. Also see Kemal, İstanbul Üniversitesi Nadide Eserler Kütüphanesi TY 331, fols. 95b–96a.

17 For a comprehensive list of the anonymous histories, see Anon., *Topkapı Anonymous* xlii–xlix and Yerasimos, *La fondation* 251–53.

18 Ménage, *A survey* 183.

19 Ahmedi, *İskendernâme* 25–7.

in tandem with a general shift from orality to literacy. Either to bring together the two distinct narratives of Ottoman history or to render it more colorful, the *Tevârihi Ali Osman* quoted from Ahmedî's *İskendername*, and several decades later, in 1561, a new edition of Neşri's *Cihannüma* also quoted it. Besides these two, no other Ottoman history quoted the *Dastan* in such fashion.

2 The Nature of *Dastan* Quotes in the *Tevârihi Ali Osman* and *Cihannüma*

The first interesting feature of the Ahmedî quotes found in the *Tevârihi Ali Osman* books and the 968/1561 edition of the *Cihannüma* is that they appear at exactly the same locations in the text. As noted, both texts are composed in prose, and the verses they utilize from the *Dastan* are easily identifiable. Stylistically, they offer colorful and poetic views of the various episodes of Ottoman history. Most of them are long, and cite what Ahmedî wrote about the period before the *Tevârihi Ali Osman* and *Cihannüma* presented their own views about the same period. However, the quotes differ significantly in length. For example, the first quote from the *Dastan* in the *Tevârihi Ali Osman* is sixty-eight consecutive couplets; it reproduces everything Ahmedî wrote about the reign of Osman's father Ertuğrul (r. 627–79/1230–81) and Osman's (r. 679–98/1281–99) accession to the throne after his father's death.²⁰ Concerning these topics, the *Cihannüma* contains only six couplets from the *Dastan*.²¹ Yet, regarding Orhan (r. 724–63/1324–62), almost the reverse happens: of the seventy-eight couplets Ahmedî wrote, the *Tevârihi Ali Osman* quotes fourteen, while the *Cihannüma* quotes thirty-four. In short, the enthusiasm to quote from Ahmedî's work is strong, but varies from one book to the other.

2.1 *Dastan* Quotes in the *Tevârihi Ali Osman* and *Cihannüma* That Appear the Same

Regarding Osman's later reign, the *Tevârihi Ali Osman* quotes three of the six couplets Ahmedî composed,²² while the *Cihannüma* quotes four.²³ This suggests that they were following a pattern.

20 Ahmedî, *İskendername* fol. 65b; Silay, Ahmedî's history 145–7; Ahmedî, *Osmanlı Tarihleri* 8–9; Anon., *Topkapı Anonymous* fols. 1b–3a; Anon., *Tevârih Âl-i 'Osman* fols. 1b–3b.

21 Neşri, *Cihannüma*, fol. 21a.

22 Ahmedî, *İskendername*, ed. Ünver, fol. 65b; Silay, Ahmedî's history 147; *İskendername*, Ahmedî, "Dastan," *Osmanlı Tarihleri*, ed. Atsız 9; Anon., *Tevârih Âl-i 'Osman* fol. 6a; Anon., *Topkapı Anonymous* fol. 5a.

23 Neşri, *Cihannüma*, fol. 25a.

TABLE 4.1 On Osman Bey's activities

	Text from the <i>Dastan</i>	<i>Tevarihi Ali Osman</i>	<i>Cihannüma</i>
1	Osman had become such a great <i>gazi</i> that wherever he went, he succeeded.	✓	✓
2	He sent companies of soldiers everywhere, so that they would attack the cities and kill the infidel.	✓	✓
3	That illustrious one conquered Bilecük, as well as Eynegöl and Köprühisar.		
4	He did not stop; he sent raiders everywhere. He conquered many provinces in a short time.	✓	✓
5	That famous one annihilated the infidel. He besieged Bursa and İznik.		✓
6	Because God—may He be honored and glorified—had preordained it, before conquering these two, the appointed hour of [his] death came.	✓	

At first, it seems that both books, the *Tevarihi Ali Osman* and the *Cihannüma*, follow the same pattern. In fact, if we look at the style of quotations, that is, where and why the quotes are utilized, we see similarities, such as the ones discussed below.

2.2 Dastan Quotes in the *Tevarihi Ali Osman* and *Cihannüma*: Similarities in Their Functions and Locations

The quotes from the *Dastan* found in the *Tevarihi Ali Osman* and *Cihannüma* are often stylistically the same; that is, they are inserted at the same or for similar sections of the text and serve almost the same purposes. We see a good example of this is the way they are used in the context of Orhan's reign (724–63/1324–62). Here, the two sources reproduce a radically different number of lines, but their styles are parallel. The *Tevarihi Ali Osman* quotes thirteen couplets and separates them into three sections, serving as an introduction to Orhan's reign,²⁴ an introduction to his son Süleyman Çelebi's activities,²⁵ and

24 Ahmedî, *İskendername* fol. 65b; Silay, Ahmedî's history 147–8; Ahmedî, "Dastan," *Osmanlı Tarihleri* 9; Anon., *Tevarîh Âl-i 'Osman* fol. 13b; Anon., *Topkapı Anonymous* fol. 9b.

25 Ahmedî, *İskendername*, fol. 65b; Silay, Ahmedî's history 148–9; Ahmedî, "Dastan," *Osmanlı Tarihleri* 11; Anon., *Tevarîh Âl-i 'Osman* fol. 13b; Anon., *Topkapı Anonymous*, Öztürk fol. 9b.

a description of Orhan’s sadness upon receiving the news of Süleyman Çelebi’s death.²⁶ The *Cihannüma* repeats the same formula, separating the quotes into three sections for the same intervals, but it introduces Orhan’s reign in four couplets,²⁷ twenty-six related to Süleyman Çelebi’s activities,²⁸ and sixteen about the end of Orhan’s reign.²⁹ Below is a comparison of the quotes used to introduce Orhan followed by the quotes regarding Süleyman Çelebi’s activities.

2.2.1 On Orhan Bey’s Activities

TABLE 4.2 On Orhan Bey’s activities

	<i>Dastan</i>	<i>Tevarih-i Ali Osman</i>	<i>Cihannüma</i>
1	When he [Osman] died Orhan took his place. Saints told him: “[Go] and conquer Khan!”	✓	✓
2	The army came from all sides, as he plundered the infidel day and night.	✓	
3	He enslaved the women [and] the children, whoever he found; they [the army] killed the rest, whether old or young.	✓	
4	The servants of the faith overcame the infidel, and after that, they pressed and pressed, waging war.	✓	
5	Having been a <i>padişah</i> [by the help of] God, Orhan became a supporter of and refuge for the true believers.	✓	✓
6	The flag of Islam was exalted [and] eternal. The verses of Quran were manifest forever.	✓	✓
7	Orhan was just and merciful. The justice of Ömer ^a was forgotten after that of Orhan.	✓	✓
8	He built many mosques and mihrabs, and established a number of shelters.		✓

26 Ahmedî, *İskendername*, fol. 65b; Silay, Ahmedî’s history 150; Ahmedî, “*Dastan*,” *Osmanlı Tarihleri* 12; Anon., *Tevarih Âl-i ‘Osman* fol. 17b; Anon., *Topkapı Anonymous* fol. 12b.

27 Neşri, *Cihannüma*, fol. 47b.

28 Note that Süleyman Çelebi’s activities constituted an important part of the narratives of Orhan’s reign. All ninth-/fifteenth-century Ottoman history books dedicated multiple folios to Süleyman Çelebi; *ibid.* fol. 56b.

29 *Ibid.* fol. 59a.

TABLE 4.2 On Orhan Bey’s activities (*cont.*)

	<i>Dastan</i>	<i>Tevarihi Ali Osman</i>	<i>Cihannüma</i>
9	Orhan was a devout Muslim [and] a true believer. The scientists and scholars obtained support from him.		✓
10	While he said poverty is close to blasphemy, fortune became his guide in difficulty.		✓
11	He [Orhan] made him Paşa Sinan for the sake of science and scholarship.		✓
12	[Sinan] acquired wealth, high position, and dignity.		✓
13	He was more generous than Hatemi. He endeavored [to undertake his work] more than Rustemi did.		✓

a This is a reference to the rule of ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-Khaṭṭāb (13–23/634–44), one of the rightly-guided caliphs.

2.2.2 On Süleyman Çelebi’s Activities

TABLE 4.3 On Süleyman Çelebi’s activities

	<i>Dastan</i>	<i>Tevarihi Ali Osman</i>	<i>Cihannüma</i>
1	Süleyman Paşa was the eldest son [of Orhan]; he had all the qualities to be a leader.	✓	✓
2	He was both brave and munificent; he had [the ability to] govern and rule.	✓	✓
3	He was endowed with good qualities, to the extent that he was renowned for his kindness.	✓	✓
4	He always did his best, he fought on behalf of Islam until he died.	✓	✓
5	When he was given an idea, he was like Asaf; when he was fighting in the theater of war, he carried the ranks he attained with greatness.	✓	✓
6	What a virtue! He knew how to fight on behalf of Islam. He sacrificed his life for the sake of God.	✓	✓

TABLE 4.3 On Süleyman Çelebi's activities (*cont.*)

	<i>Dastan</i>	<i>Tevarihi Ali Osman</i>	<i>Cihannüma</i>
7	He was a brave swordsman, and he pressed the enemy and broke [defeated] the armies.	✓	✓
8	Orhan sent him to the opposite shore to fight there for some time, on behalf of Islam.		✓
9	So he marched with the soldiers and conquered countries, cities, and [other] lands. Whatever he found in [the regions] of the infidel, he destroyed, [and] he burned their homes.		✓
10	He killed those who would not accept [Islam] at his invitation, and made the army of Islam victorious.		✓
11	By the order of God and his father's judgment, he arrived in the region of infidels with the army.		✓
12	There he engaged in several battles (<i>gaza</i>) for the faith [and] it was suitable to [call him] by the name <i>gazi</i> .'		✓
13	Wherever he went he became the victor; he conquered countries, cities, and fortresses.		✓
14	There he fought, in such a manner that, in the West, the Fireng ^a were routed.		✓
15	Wherever that illustrious one reached, he conquered cities and countries.		✓
16	Whatever he demanded, he obtained. Of course [finally] he became a great sultan.		✓
17	He was given fortresses, properties, and tribute. He took many taxes from the <i>begs</i> of the infidel.		✓
18	Wherever he found a church, he demolished it. He destroyed the church bell and burned the bell pull. He threw the blasphemy to the ground, [and] made it invisible, reviving "La ilahe illallah."		✓
19	He demolished many churches, and turned them into mosques; there was no polytheism [for him], he was a monotheist.		✓
20	Several times he went on campaigns; he routed a great number of infidels.		✓

TABLE 4.3 On Süleyman Çelebi's activities (cont.)

	<i>Dastan</i>	<i>Tevarihi Ali Osman</i> <i>Cihannüma</i>
21	He conquered these three, too: Vize, Mıgalkara, and Ipsala.	✓
22	There the infidel soldiers were exhausted; there the banner of blasphemy was brought down.	✓
23	Months and years passed quickly; cities and countries were full of Allah[u] Ekber [sounds].	✓
24	Now Muḥammad is [revered] where Jesus used to be worshiped.	✓

a This refers to the ‘infidels’ or westerners.

Evidently, there is a stylistic parallel that extends beyond simple coincidence, since this pattern is repeated on other occasions, as we see in the pages to follow. This suggests that the scribe of the 968/1561 copy of Neşri’s work was familiar with the style used in the *Tevarihi Ali Osman* to arrange the quotes from the *Dastan*. However, instead of relying on the *Tevarihi Ali Osman* as his source, he quoted the *Dastan* directly, as is clear from the variations in the length of his quotes. Overall, of the forty-one couplets *Dastan* devoted to Orhan’s reign, the *Tevarihi Ali Osman* reproduced only seven, whereas the *Cihannüma* reproduced twenty-six. Although at first this suggests that the *Cihannüma* offers a more comprehensive reproduction of the *Dastan*, later quotations refute this point. In fact, the *Tevarihi Ali Osman* also included long quotations and at times surpassed the *Cihannüma* in terms of reproducing the pages of the *Dastan*, as shown below.

2.3 *Extensive Dastan Quotes in the Tevarihi Ali Osman and the Cihannüma*

On occasion, the *Tevarihi Ali Osman* is as comprehensive as the *Cihannüma* in terms of reproducing the *Dastan*. Perhaps the best example of this is its quotes regarding Murad I’s reign (763–91/1362–89). Regarding this era, the *Tevarihi Ali*

Osman reproduced fifty-two of one hundred seventeen couplets found in the *Dastan*, and the *Cihannüma* reproduced forty-two.³⁰ Below are the quotations.

TABLE 4.4 On Murad I's activities

	<i>Dastan</i>	<i>Tevarihi Ali Osman</i>	<i>Cihannüma</i>
1	When the hour of death came from God, Orhan left for the garden of heaven.	✓	✓
2	Holding the crown and the throne for 39 years, he made [certain that his] horse's trappings reached the rose garden of paradise.	✓	✓
3	<i>Gazi</i> Murad took [his] position. His aim was to fight on behalf of Islam.	✓	✓
4	He was a perfect <i>padişah</i> and a wise [person]. He was cautious and intelligent.	✓	✓
5	He was modest, and he endeavored with zeal. He was not harmful, but useful.	✓	✓
6	Even when he felt sorrow, he was glad. He was happy like a rose surrounded by thorns.	✓	✓
7	Poor or abandoned, whoever came to him obtained a portion from his benefaction.	✓	✓
8	He became a protector of many destitute [people]; he made many poor people commanders.	✓	
9	He cut many people's heads off [and] threw them from the ground to the sky.	✓	✓
10	Leaving Çender because of destitution, Halil-i Çenderi entered into his presence.		✓
11	[Halil-i Çenderi] was an ignorant [person]; he was deprived of any talent. [Murad], seeing his difficult situation and poverty, kindly made him a state officer.		✓
12	Ultimately, he made [Halil-i Çenderi] a vizier. What a vizier! He became a great ruler.		✓

30 Ahmedi, *İskendernâme*, fol. 66a–b; Silay, Ahmedî's history 150–2; Ahmedi, "*Dastan*," *Osmanlı Tarihleri* 13; Anon., *Tevârîh Âl-i 'Osman* fols. 19a–20b, and 26b; Anon., *Topkapı Anonymous*, fols. 13b–14b, fol. 18a.

TABLE 4.4 On Murad I's activities (*cont.*)

	<i>Dastan</i>	<i>Tevarihi Ali Osman</i>	<i>Cihannüma</i>
13	A sultan should be like this, so that his name will not be erased from the tablet of benevolence.		✓
14	The <i>padişah</i> should have such a [broad] understanding that, in his presence, there should be both dust and gold together.		✓
15	The sultan should have the goodness of a <i>hümay</i> [bird of paradise], so that when a mendicant comes to him, the latter will be treated as a sovereign.		✓
16	Because that fortune came to <i>Gazi</i> Murad, he was the adornment of the crown and throne.	✓	✓
17	He devoted himself to fighting on behalf of Islam forever; he gave the infidels the punishment they deserved.	✓	✓
18	He had strength, power, and might; he was both young and heroic.	✓	✓
19	He was quite well known for being valiant. He also endeavored with zeal to fight on behalf of Islam.	✓	✓
20	They were all devastated by his sword [because] the kindness of God became a refuge to him.	✓	✓
21	It was he who first extended his hand to Rum. He gave much trouble to Kayser.	✓	
22	He took Engüriyye in battle [and] invaded Sultan Yügi by force.	✓	✓
23	The Shah of Karaman fought with him; nevertheless, [Murad Beg] made [the Shah's] life unbearable.	✓	✓
24	He [Karaman Shah] asked for help and support from everywhere. Those who had power became a refuge to him.	✓	✓

TABLE 4.4 On Murad I's activities (*cont.*)

	<i>Dastan</i>	<i>Tevarihi Ali Osman</i>	<i>Cihannüma</i>
25	Every hero among the Tatars was a soldier and friend to him.	✓	✓
26	The Varsak, Turgud, Türk, Rum, and Şam supported him without exception.	✓	✓
27	Having heard the news, <i>Gazi</i> Murad marched in splendor to become famous.	✓	✓
28	He did not ask for help from anybody; it was God who bestowed the conquest upon [Murad] because of his faith.	✓	✓
29	He was [like] lightning; he flashed when he was fighting. He fought like a lion with the enemy.	✓	✓
30	Lances were broken, sharp swords were snapped into pieces. You would think that the Day of Resurrection had come.	✓	✓
31	Both the Türks and Tatars were destroyed and became fodder for his sword.	✓	✓
32	The Shah of Karaman fled from him. [<i>Gazi</i> Murad] became the owner of the sun, sky, and moon.	✓	✓
33	Leaving all their belongings, they [the Karamalu, or people of Karaman] fled to save their dear lives.	✓	✓
34	You know what the Karamanlu have! Everyone [and everything] was destroyed there.	✓	✓
35	Many begs were killed there. Many young men fell [and] passed away.	✓	✓
36	Because this conquest was facilitated by God, he was determined and resolved [to fight] the infidels.	✓	✓
37	Wherever he went, he achieved victory. His sword hit their shields.	✓	✓
38	His arrow's spearhead became death. Wherever it fell, it brought annihilation.	✓	✓

TABLE 4.4 On Murad I's activities (*cont.*)

	<i>Dastan</i>	<i>Tevarihi Ali Osman</i>	<i>Cihannüma</i>
39	Finally, he attained victory against the infidel. He turned the land of the infidels upside down.	✓	✓
40	Humility shows [one's] devotion to the worship of God. The virtue of obedience to God is useless without it.	✓	
41	The person finds prosperity from obedience to God. May he not have anything in his heart except God.	✓	
42	If you have [any] trace of worldly desire in your heart, do not think that [your] worship is blessed; it has become evil!	✓	
43	He who thinks about worldly desires does not find anything useful. Destroy the desire for this world in your heart, so that [your] affairs will go well.	✓	
44	Strive to remove everything God disapproves of from [your] heart, if you do not want [your] affairs to be inauspicious.	✓	
45	Finally, he coveted the Laz [people]; necessarily, a battle began between them.	✓	
46	The fire-worshippers and Christians, everyone between here and the West, sent innumerable soldiers to the Laz [as auxiliaries]	✓	
47	So they fought against <i>Gazi</i> Murad to destroy his existence.	✓	
48	<i>Gazi</i> Han fought with them [<i>Gazi</i> Han's enemies united under the Laz], to the extent that they could find no way out.	✓	
49	Such a battle broke out between [them] that it went down in history with time.	✓	✓
50	Wherever one looked, there were [only] heads; wherever one went, there were [only] bodies.	✓	✓
51	The soil and the stone were mixed with blood; every dried tear was ruby-colored.	✓	✓

TABLE 4.4 On Murad I's activities (*cont.*)

	<i>Dastan</i>	<i>Tevarihi Ali Osman</i>	<i>Cihannüma</i>
52	The theater [of the battle] was full of heads and layers of bodies; the horses were walking on the corpses.	✓	✓
53	Becoming worn out from the violence of that battle, the infidel ran away in misery.	✓	✓
54	The cavalry pursued the enemy. The sultan stayed behind with some slaves.	✓	
55	The leader waited there so that when the army came back they would be able to find him.	✓	
56	Apparently, an infidel was lying with [his body] covered with blood from head to toe.	✓	
57	He had hidden himself among the bodies, but saw <i>Gazi</i> Murad clearly.	✓	
58	As fate would have it, he was lying, then he [suddenly] stood [and] leapt up to stab the sultan with a <i>khanjar</i> .	✓	
59	At the same time, the auspicious sultan—who was a <i>gazi</i> —certainly became a martyr.	✓	
60	There is no prevention, that is the way of destiny. The human is not immortal.	✓	
61	He was a <i>gazi</i> , he sacrificed himself for the sake of God. He is certainly a martyr.	✓	
62	Ask for help from spirits, so that you will be able to meet the conquest with the help of his victories.	✓	

Nevertheless, the *Cihannüma* remains a more comprehensive reproduction of the *Dastan*. The reign of Bayezid I, the last sultan treated in the *Dastan*, is the best example of this. The *Dastan* devotes forty-four couplets to the subject, while the *Tevarihi Ali Osman* quotes eleven, and the *Cihannüma* quotes thirty-six. Interestingly, the *Tevarihi Ali Osman* combines its quotations on this interval with a very large section taken from an earlier chapter of Ahmedi, one that totals seventy-two couplets. Below is a discussion of these quotes.

2.4 Quotations in the *Tevarihi Ali Osman* from *Ahmedi's Iskendername*

The anonymous writers of the *Tevarihi Ali Osman* were more willing to delve into the *İskedername* than was the editor, who inserted quotations in a later edition of the *Cihannüma*. This is a unique quality of the *Tevarihi Ali Osman*, although it does not change the fact that, in terms of historical information, the *Cihannüma* contains more of the *Dastan*. It proves that the author(s) of the *Tevarihi Ali Osman* were well-informed about the *İskendername*, and had access to the full text, not just the *Dastan* section.

In its narrative of Bayezid I's reign, the *Tevarihi Ali Osman* includes four batches of quotes from Ahmedi's *İskendername*. Among them, the second batch, which is the largest, with twenty-two couplets, comes not from the *Dastan*, but from an earlier chapter of the *İskendername* titled "Criticism of the scholars interested in worldly possessions," a chapter which is completely unrelated to the Ottoman history. This quote (of twenty-two couplets) reads as follows (author's translation):

He who had some learning, used to not look at possessions.

For he knew they would not last and would become the afterlife's burden.

What happened to the wise ones, those judges, who issued laws?

Now their lives are dedicated to greed, they can never be fully satisfied.

They are worse than the followers of the Hebrew Bible, they would sell their Quran for a penny if they could.

He wears the head gear (of the scholar), but his self [i.e., personal achievement] is more important than his work.

That's how they love the house of world, and consider it more important than their lives.

Afraid an equal share may be given to people, like a dog, he steals from them.

What a lack of knowledge and so many wrongs; he is a donkey, surrounded by hundreds of books.³¹

31 İlimden kimde ki var idi eser / Ol zamanda mala itmez idi nazar / Kim bilürdi yağ idi anda beka / Âhirette olur kişiye saka / N'oldı şimdi ilmi da'vî eyleyen / Ya hakîmem deyüben söz söyleyen / Kim olupdur hırsa cânı pâyımâl / Karnı toymaz dirdüğünce genc ü mal / Oldı Tevrât okıyandan uş beter / Bir pula bulursa Kur'an'nın satar / Eyle sevmiş işbu dünyâ menzilin / Kim tutar candan azîz âb u gilin / Hubs ü tezvîr ü hased endîşesi / İt bigi halkı talamak pîşesi / Yoh yakın ilminde lîkin tolu şek / Yüz kitâb içinde şöyle kim eşek. From Ahmedi, *İskendername* fol. 22b, in consultation with Anon., *Tevarîh Âl-i 'Osman* 31–2. Anon., *Topkapı Anonymous* fol. 20a.

His work is like his desire, an irrelevant slumber; his work is dirty like hatred itself.

He is bitter like the evil world full of vengeance; he struggles like a snake passing its poison.

He is fast like lucky scavenger; he is ugly like an owl in a cemetery during the day.

He is a lazy trickster like a crow; he is like a bee living without honey.

If you give a rich young man to one of them, the youngster will return arguing he has nothing in life.

His head [is] filled with the arrogance of dirt and grudges; his guide, the devil who was rejected from God's compassion.

This is a man who will show two faces in public, and say he is an heir of the Prophet, he is shameless.

He who is nearly an heir of the Prophet, should not have envy, arrogance, and hate.

Since he looks after the jewels of the earth, there is the justice of gold in his work.

To purify he must clean himself as such, he will shine like a mirror.

The hidden ones [i.e., the saints] are all present there, where the spiritual knowledge of God's secret is.

Learning the wisdom of the messengers' science, is inherited by those who are closer to God.

In the end, everyone will leave behind what they possess; if it is going to be left behind, what is the point of amassing it?³²

Clearly, this quote was made to serve a moral argument. It identified the level of incompetence among the judges, and claimed that it was unprecedented. For our purposes, the same quote also shows the creativity of the author(s) of the *Tevarihi Ali Osman*.

Bayezid I was the last ruler of the Ottoman empire about whom Ahmedi wrote. His demise in the hands of Tīmūr was a tragic event for the empire and a devastating personal experience for Ahmedi. In his old age, he suffered through a decade-long civil war after Bayezid's death, during which his life-long patron Süleyman Çelebi, along with his three brothers, was slain. When the civil war finally ended and Mehmed I claimed the throne, he also became Ahmedi's new patron. Many early Ottoman historians, such as Şükrullah, Nişancı, Al'Konevi, and Kemal, refrained from telling stories of corruption

32 Ahmedi, *İskendername*, fol. 67b; Silay, Ahmedi's history 156; Ahmedi, "Dastan," *Osmanlı Tarihleri* 23; Anon., *Tevarih Âl-i 'Osman* fol. 46b–47a; Anon., *Topkapı Anonymous* fol. 31a–b.

during Bayezid's reign, out of concern that it would tarnish his memory further. This trend toward silence started with Ahmedi, who, as an eyewitness to all the events of Bayezid I's reign, refrained from uttering a single critical word about it. In contrast, toward the end of the ninth/fifteenth century a new revisionist history of Bayezid I's reign emerged, starting with the *Tevarihi Ali Osman*. Historians who followed this new trend, such as Neşri, transformed Bayezid I from a righteous Ottoman ruler into an outstandingly corrupt one.³³ In particular, the *Tevarihi Ali Osman* criticized the Ottoman state's legal conduct and treatment of its citizens. In this, we witness how the author(s) delved into Ahmedi's *İskendername*, extracted a vivid moral critique, and used it to color their own criticism of the sultan whom Ahmedi did not critique. This remarkable ideological move shows how knowledgeable the author(s) of the *Tevarihi Ali Osman* were. They regarded Ahmedi's work not only as a source of colorful summaries of Ottoman history, but also as a book of court literature for moral guidance, which was in fact the real purpose of Ahmedi's work, just as it was Nizami Ganjavi's original *İskendername*, which Ahmedi had imitated. The same aspect of the *İskendername* was disregarded by those who edited the 968/1561 edition of Neşri's *Cihannüma*. Writing several decades after the *Tevarihi Ali Osman*, they copied extensively from the *Dastan* section, but ignored other useful aspects of Ahmedi's text. Given that they most likely knew about this aspect of the *İskendername*, one could argue that *Tevarihi Ali Osman*'s criticism of the Bayezid I era was too far-reaching for the editor(s) of Neşri's *Cihannüma*.

Conclusion

This essay examines two sets of quotations found in two early Ottoman history books, the anonymous *Tevarihi Ali Osman* (c. 890/1485) and Neşri's *Cihannüma* (ed. 968/1561). These quotations were all made from Ahmedi's *Dastan*, the earliest [written?] narrative of Ottoman history. The *Dastan* was composed in 814/1412, and was a chapter in Ahmedi's Turkish translation of Nizami Ganjavi's *İskendername*. The quotations represent a curiosity, first because they are almost exact copies, suggesting the existence of a history writing norm among late ninth-/fifteenth-century authors. Second, consensus in modern scholarship holds that Neşri was the first Ottoman historian to bring together the two types of narratives, the eulogist and the ruler-oriented narrative that emerged with Ahmedi's *Dastan*, and the non-eulogist and non-ruler-oriented

33 Mengüç, *Histories*.

narrative that gained momentum toward the end of the ninth/fifteenth century. An examination of the quotes reveals some interesting characteristics regarding early Ottoman historiography. From these quotes, the writer(s) of *Tevarihi Ali Osman* at least re-arranged, if not fully recounted, both narratives long before Neşri did. Therefore, the tendency to relate both narratives together predated Neşri's career by nearly three decades. Third, the author(s) of *Tevarihi Ali Osman* were well acquainted with Ahmedi's *Dastan*, and, more generally, with his *İskendername*. Those who produced the 1561 version of *Cihannüma* were mainly concerned with Ahmedi's Ottoman history, and ignored the *İskendername*, though they must have been aware of it. By contrast, the author(s) of the *Tevarihi Ali Osman* recognized the larger implications of Ahmedi's work, and saw that it was more than a narrative of Ottoman history.

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PART 2

Sacred History



Hierohistory in Qāḍī l-Nu‘mān’s *Foundation of Symbolic Interpretation* (*Asās al-Ta’wīl*): the Birth of Jesus

Shafique N. Virani

Unsullied by imperfection, the Hereafter is beyond time and place. However, for those bound by time and place, it is sometimes alluded to in terms of time, sometimes in terms of place, that such folk may grasp it in their language.¹

NAṢĪR AL-DĪN AL-ṬŪSĪ, *Āghāz ū anjām*



Background

With the death of the Prophet Muḥammad, the Muslim community came to adopt a variety of interpretations of his message. Among the various schools that emerged, the Imāmī Shī‘a accepted the privileged position of the hereditary Imams of the Prophet’s family, adhering closely to their guidance. Following the death of Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq in 148/765, the community was divided. Among other groups, one eventually came to recognize the imamate of his son Mūsā l-Kāzim,² while others held to Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq’s designation

- 1 I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to Bassel Rachid, Abbas Behnejad, and Adam Ali, whose insights informed this article, to Tahera Qutbuddin, who provided the copies of *Bunyād-i ta’wīl* that she received from Faquir Hunzai, to Faquir Hunzai and Rashida Hunzai, who not only obtained for me an Arabic manuscript copy of the *Kitāb Asās al-ta’wīl*, but whose keen insights clarified many ambiguities in the text, and to the Institute of Ismaili Studies Library, which provided copies of the remaining manuscripts of the work in their collection.
- 2 The majority of Mūsā’s followers initially accepted the claims of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq’s son, ‘Abdallāh al-Aftāḥ. However, his death soon after his father’s demise led them to acknowledge Mūsā l-Kāzim. See Hodgson, *Dja‘far al-Ṣādiq* ii, 374–5; Ibn al-Haytham, *Advent* ed. 35–7, trans. 90–2; Modarressi, *Crisis* 53–61; Daftary, *Ismā‘īlīs* 94.

(*naṣṣ*) in favor of his elder son, Ismāʿīl al-Mubārak. In the course of time, the adherents of this elder lineage came to be designated as the Ismāʿīliyya,³ while

- 3 This designation was seldom used by the early sectarians themselves, rather it was applied to them by the heresiographers. Cf. Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs* 93. This group has been referred to by a plethora of names in the early literature. Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092), for example, mentions ten geographically specific designations, Ismāʿīlī (in Aleppo and Cairo), Qarmaṭī (in Baghdad, Transoxiana, and Ghazna), Mubārakī (in Kufa), Rāwandī and Burquʿī (in Basra), Khālāfī (in Rayy), Muḥammira (in Jurjān), Mubayyiḍa (in Syria), Saʿīdī (in Maghrib), Janābī (in Lahsa and Bahrain) and Bāṭinī; Niẓām al-Mulk, *Book of government* 231. Al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) mentions Bāṭiniyya, Qarāmiṭa, Khurramiyya or Khurramdiniyya, Bābakiyya, Muḥammira, Sabʿiyya, Ismāʿīliyya, and Taʿlimiyya; cited in Corbin, *The Ismāʿīlī response* 74. The name of a branch that had become particularly infamous, the Qarāmiṭa, was often applied derogatorily, and incorrectly, to the entire community. In addition, hostile historical sources frequently refer to the Ismāʿīlīs abusively as *malāḥida* (apostates or heretics). Various Muslim groups commonly referred to their foes by this derogatory name, but by Alamūt times (i.e., from roughly the sixth/twelfth century onward) it seems to have been most widely directed toward the Ismāʿīlīs; see Madelung, *Mulḥid* vii, 546. Mīrkhwānd, for example, states that the term was specifically applied to this community; see Mīrkhwānd, *Rawḍat* ix, 114, *Le jardin* ix, 155.

Many of these names are inaccurate, some polemical, and others a conflation of the group studied here with other unrelated groups. In the early period, the community commonly referred to itself as *al-daʿwa al-hādiya* ('the rightly-guiding invitation'), or simply as *al-daʿwa* ('the invitation'). We also find such names as *ahl-i ḥaqq* or *ahl-i ḥaqīqat* ('the people of truth'), used in Persian-speaking regions; *Mawlāʾī* ('the partisans of the lord'), in Hunza, Gilgit, and Chitral; *Panjtanī* ('the partisans of the five'), that is, Muḥammad, ʿAlī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan, and al-Ḥusayn, in parts of Central Asia; and *Satpanthī* ('follower of the path of truth'), *Khwāja* (*Khojā*) ('the venerable'), *Shamsī* ('the followers of Pir Shams'), and *Muʾmin* or *Momanā* ('the faithful') in South Asia.

The name currently employed in academia, Ismāʿīliyya, seems to have been used by the early community only occasionally. It appears to have originated with the early heresiographers, notably al-Nawbakhtī and al-Qummī. Moreover, the classification is not entirely precise. While it does give a sense that this community adhered to Jaʿfar al-Šādiq's nomination of Ismāʿīl as his successor (rather than the group that considered Mūsā l-Kāzim the Imam), the historical scenario is not as clear. Even among the groups that eventually acknowledged Mūsā l-Kāzim as the Imam, there were some who, due to the explicit designation of Jaʿfar al-Šādiq in favor of Ismāʿīl, considered him the Imam before Mūsā. Thus, they could also claim to be called Ismāʿīliyya. It was against this lineage (and that of a transfer of the imamate from ʿAbdallāh al-Aʿṭāḥ to Mūsā l-Kāzim) that later Twelver scholars adopted the doctrine that after al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, the imamate could not pass between brothers. This tradition is cited by the famous heresiographer, al-Nawbakhtī, among others. For a full account see Sachedina, *Islamic messianism* 44–5.

The term Ismāʿīlī, however, has a number of advantages, not least of which is its currency in academia. Moreover, it was not rejected among the Ismāʿīlīs themselves. In a riposte to al-Ghazālī's virulent attack on the community in his *Kitāb faḍāʾih al-Bāṭiniyya wa-faḍāʾil al-Mustaḥzirīyya* (Infamies of the Bāṭinīs and virtues of the Mustaḥzirīs), ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. Walīd (d. 612/1215), the fifth *dāʿī* of the Mustaʿlī Ismāʿīlīs, comments on the names al-Ghazālī ascribed to them. With regards to the term Ismāʿīliyya, he vaunts: "This name designates those whose [spiritual] ancestry goes back to Mawlānā Ismāʿīl ibn

the younger lineage came to be known as the Ithnā'ashariyya, or Twelver Shī'a, after the disappearance of their twelfth Imam.

In the year 297/909, the Ismā'īlī Imam 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī (d. 322/934) established the Fāṭimid caliphate. At the height of their power, the Fāṭimid caliphs claimed dominion over all of North Africa, Egypt, Sicily, the Red Sea coast of Africa, Yemen, Syria, Palestine, and the Hijaz with the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. A noteworthy feature of the Ismā'īlīs was their invitation (*da'wa*) to recognize the Imam of the time. The writings of Fāṭimid intellectuals, including such figures as Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī (d. after 361/971), Qāḍī l-Nu'mān (d. 363/974), Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. after 411/1020), al-Mu'ayyad fī l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1078), and Ḥakīm Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. after 462/1070), emphasize the importance of understanding the world and faith by maintaining a proper balance between their exterior, physical, literal, and apparent forms (their *ẓāhir*) and their esoteric, spiritual, symbolic, and intellectual realities (their *bāṭin*). The process of evincing the latter from the former is known as *ta'wīl*, or symbolic interpretation. In this article I analyze the concept of *ta'wīl*, focusing on its Ismā'īlī form; introduce the *Asās al-ta'wīl* (Foundation of symbolic interpretation) of Qāḍī l-Nu'mān, one of the preeminent authors of works of this genre; analyze the concepts of sacred biography, hierohistory, and the spiritual hierarchy (*hudūd al-dīn*) as elaborated in this text; and then translate a portion of the *Asās al-ta'wīl* about the birth of Jesus (Q 3:42–48) as an example of this esoteric approach to sacred history.

1 Symbolic Interpretation (*Ta'wīl*)

The Arabic word *ta'wīl* is the verbal noun derived from the second form of the verb *awwala*, to cause something to return to its origin or source.⁴ Muslims, whether Shī'ī or Sunnī, who championed the role of intellect in understanding faith, advocated the use of symbolic interpretation (*ta'wīl*). Those who

Ja'far al-Šādiq, ibn Muḥammad al-Bāqir, ibn 'Alī Zayn al-Ābidīn, ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Taqī, ibn 'Alī al-Murtaḍā al-Waṣī. This is our inherent name. It is our honour and our glory before all of the other branches of Islam, because we stand on the Path of the Truth, in following our guides the Imāms. We drink at an abundant fountain, and we hold firmly to the guiding lines of their *walāya*. Thus they cause us to climb from rank to rank among the degrees of proximity [to God] and excellence"; translated in Corbin, Ismā'īlī response 74–5. See also Poonawala, Ismā'īlī refutation 131–4. Significantly, this name is now current in the communities that consider themselves the inheritors of the traditions of the descendants of the Imam Ismā'īl. Thus, despite the drawbacks outlined above, I use this term.

4 Poonawala, *Ta'wīl* x, 390–2 provides a brief review of studies and sources on this subject.

defended a literal understanding of the Quran castigated them, often charging them with unbelief (*kufr*). The proponents of symbolic interpretation did not hesitate to respond in kind. For example, the Mu'tazilis, who referred to themselves as the *ahl al-tawhīd wa-l-'adl* (people of divine unity and justice), insisted that scriptural references to such things as God's hand and face must be understood allegorically, using *ta'wīl* to interpret what they saw as clearly symbolic. They mocked the Ḥanbalīs for refusing to use the divine gift of intellect to understand anthropomorphic descriptions of God, and contemptuously called them *hashwiyya*, meaning pillow stuffers, simpletons or dimwits.⁵

The Ismā'īlī savant Nāṣir-i Khusraw explained that by revelation or *tanzīl* (lit., descent), intellectual matters are expressed in a perceptible form.⁶ Meanwhile, by a process of symbolic interpretation (*ta'wīl*), the perceptible forms are returned to their original intellectual state.⁷ In verse, he exhorts his audience not to be content with exoteric forms, but to seek out those who can reveal the original spiritual meaning of the revelation:

Daryā-yi sukhānhā sukhān-i khūb-i Khudāyst
Pur gawhar-i bā-qīmat-ū pur lu'lu'y-i lālā
Shūrast chū daryā ba-mathal zāhir-i tanzīl
Ta'wīl chū lu'lu'st sūy-i mardum-i dānā
Andar-i bun-i daryāst hama gawhar-ū lu'lu'
Ghawwāṣ ṭalab kun chi dawī bar lab-i daryā

God's Word is the ocean of words,

Brimful with precious, lustrous pearls.

Its revelation (*tanzīl*) is like the ocean's brackish waters,

While its symbolic interpretation (*ta'wīl*) is like pearls for the wise.

As the pearls lie scattered in the ocean's depths

Why do you scamper along its shores? Seek a diver!⁸

While many exponents of *ta'wīl* employed it primarily to understand anthropomorphic descriptions of God, the Ismā'īlīs believed that it should also be applied to the canonical law (*sharī'a*), sacred history, and creation itself.⁹ The

5 Frank, *al-Ghazali* 14; Laoust, *La profession* 11–2; Hashwiyya iii, 269.

6 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfir* 368.

7 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Wajh-i dīn* 147.

8 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Dīwān-i ash'ār-i Ḥakīm-Muḥaqqiq* 5; Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Dīwān-i ash'ār-i Nāṣir-i Khusraw-Taḳawī* 3. See also Nāṣir Khusraw, *Knowledge* 65. All translations from Arabic and Persian in this paper are my own, except where otherwise indicated.

9 An analysis of one example of the latter may be found in Virani, *Days* 74–83.

anonymous *Risāla-yi širāt al-mustaqīm* (Epistle of the right path), for example, explains that “The path of the People of Teaching (*taʿlīmīyya*, that is, the Ismailis) is such that, to the extent possible, the dictates of the canonical law can be adopted and made compatible with intellectual principles and the wisdom of symbolic interpretation (*qawaʿid-i maʿqūl wa ḥikmat-i taʿwīl*).”¹⁰ The authority to dispense the *taʿwīl* belongs exclusively to those whom God specifically appointed to this task. Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān writes in *Asās al-taʿwīl* (Foundation of symbolic interpretation):

Almighty God made [the Quran’s] external form (*ẓāhir*) the miracle of his Messenger and its inner meaning (*bāṭin*) the miracle of the Imams from the people of his household (*ahl bayt*). It cannot be found with anyone but them, and none can produce the like of it save them, just as none can produce the like of the external form of the Book save their grandfather, Muḥammad, the Messenger of God. Only the Imams from his progeny can expound its inner meanings, and this knowledge is passed on and inherited in their lineage, and entrusted to them. It cannot be found with anyone except them. Thus, they address all peoples in accordance with their ability to comprehend it, bestowing upon the folk of each rank their due, withholding what ought to be withheld, and denying it to the undeserving, in accordance with the words of Almighty God, “This is Our gift for you to either lavish upon others or withhold, without Our taking account” (Q 38:39).¹¹

Thus, in Ismāʿīlī belief, none could authorize the dispensation of *taʿwīl* except the Imams, whose exclusive prerogative it was to grant a believer permission to convey the *taʿwīl*.

By applying *taʿwīl* to sacred history, the Ismāʿīlīs evolved a unique historiographical perspective, one that imbued the stories of the prophets and Imams with deep symbolic significance, essentially creating a hierohistory. Henry Corbin (d. 1978) was perhaps the first to discuss in depth this historiographical perspective in esoteric Islam. He explains:

10 Virani, *Right path* 221, trans. (slightly modified) 212.

11 Al-Nuʿmān, *Asās al-taʿwīl*, ed. Tāmīr 31–2. All translations from the *Asās al-taʿwīl* are based on my forthcoming critical edition of the Arabic text. For ease of reference, I provide the corresponding passage in the Tāmīr/Khaḍḍūr editions, but the translation may not accord in all aspects with the texts in these older editions.

The name *hierohistory* here signifies the configurations implicit in the idea of *cycles* (*dawr*, plural *adwār*) of prophecy and of the *walāya* [imamate]—a history, that is, which does not consist in the observation, recording or critique of empirical facts, but derives from a mode of perception that goes beyond the materiality of empirical facts.... Facts perceived in this manner possess, to be sure, the reality of events; but these events do not possess the reality of the physical world and its people—the events with which our history books are filled, since it is out of them that ‘history is made’. We are dealing with *spiritual facts* in the strict sense of the word. They take place in *metahistory* ... or else they *show through* the course taken by the things of this world: they are both the invisible aspect of the event and the invisible event which eludes profane empirical perception because implicit in it is the ‘theophanic perception’ which alone is able to apprehend a *mazhar* or theophanic form. The prophets and the Imams are perceived as such only on the level of a hierohistory, of a sacred history.... Thus, hierohistory begins by envisaging that which constitutes the ‘descent’, in order to conclude by describing the ‘re-ascent’, the closing of the cycle.¹²

Hierohistory thus led the adepts from the confines of time to the end time, which is timeless. The approach is well articulated by Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī in *Āghāz ū anjām* (The beginning and the end), in which he explains that the events of sacred history we perceive in time and place are really symbols of something beyond time and place, expressed in time and place only because ordinary human beings are unable to comprehend them without such references: “Unsullied by imperfection, the Hereafter is beyond time and place. However, for those bound by time and place, it is sometimes alluded to in terms of time, sometimes in terms of place, that such folk may grasp it in their language.”¹³

Al-Muʾayyad fī l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī elaborates further, explaining that *taʾwīl* is what reunites the beginning and end of the circle of existence:

Know that in one sense the science of symbolic interpretation (*ʿilm al-taʾwīl*) is the science of the world to come (*ʿilm al-ʿāqiba*) and of that which ushers the matter (*al-amr*) toward it. God, most hallowed, says, “That is the best and most beautiful symbolic interpretation (*taʾwīl*) (Q 4:59).” In another sense, it is to return something to its source

¹² Corbin, *History* 61–2; see Daftary, *Dawr* (1) vii, 151–3.

¹³ al-Ṭūsī, *Āghāz* 50, my translation, cf. 60.

(*awwalih*), just as the word *ta'khīr* means to propel something to its destination (*ākhirih*). The source and the destination are the two ends that reunite and connect the alpha and omega of a circle encompassing all that is between them both.¹⁴

2 Qāḍī l-Nu'mān and *The Foundation of Symbolic Interpretation*

Al-Qāḍī Abū Ḥanīfa b. Muḥammad al-Nu'mān, commonly referred to as Qāḍī l-Nu'mān, was among the pioneers who sought to demonstrate an esoteric counterpart to the histories narrated in the Quran. Best known to us for his contributions to Islamic law, this Fāṭimid jurist was a consummate polymath. A poet and scholar of the *ḥadīth* sciences, he was also the author of the most important Ismā'īlī history on the establishment of the Fāṭimid caliphate, the *Ifṭitāḥ al-da'wa* (Commencement of the mission). Thus far, his contributions to Muslim esoteric thought have been less studied. His magisterial legal compendium, *Da'ā'im al-Islām* (The pillars of Islam), for example, has its counterpart in his multi-volume *Ta'wīl al-da'ā'im* (Symbolic interpretation of the pillars). This work explores the symbolism of Islamic acts of worship (*'ibādāt*), including such things as prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage. Religious observances were not alone in having an inner meaning. The words of the Quran, including the histories of the prophets, were also objects of the author's esoteric exegesis. This is most apparent in his *Asās al-ta'wīl* (Foundation of symbolic interpretation), in which he explains his purpose in writing the work as follows:

We have entitled this book *Asās al-ta'wīl*, and set forth its principles as cardinal among the stages [of knowledge]. Our aim is to explain the inner dimension (*bāṭin*) of what we laid out in the book *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, so that this book may be a source for the inner meaning (*bāṭin*), just as that one is for the external form (*ẓāhir*). We seek help from God, and there is no power nor strength except in God, the sublime, the mighty.¹⁵

Walāya, the concept that God's supreme authority must always have a representative in creation, is foremost among what al-Nu'mān identifies as the pillars of Islam. These pillars differed from those found in some other schools of Islam. *Walāya* is thus intimately connected with *īmān* (faith). After explaining that *īmān* is the inner aspect of Islam, in his *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, al-Nu'mān relates

14 Al-Shīrāzī, *al-Majālis* ii, *majlis* 193, 580.

15 Al-Nu'mān, *Asās al-ta'wīl*, ed. Tāmir 27.

a tradition from Imam ‘Alī, further elaborating the connection of *īmān* and *walāya*, and connecting both of them to *maʿrifa*, or recognition of the divine.

The Commander of the Faithful, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, was asked, “What is *īmān*, and what is *islām*?” He replied, “*Islām* is affirmation (*iqrār*), while *īmān* is affirmation plus recognition (*maʿrifa*). Whoever has been given knowledge by God regarding Him, His Prophet and His Imam, and then professes his faith in these three, is a believer (*muʾmin*).”¹⁶

Submission to *walāya*, as manifested in God’s prophets and Imams, was what imbued all the other pillars of Islam, such as prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage, with meaning and efficacy. While the symbolism of the secondary pillars was detailed in the book *Taʾwīl daʿāʾim al-Islām* (The symbolic interpretation of the pillars of Islam), the central pillar, *walāya*, deserved its own exposition. Thus, the *Asās al-taʾwīl* (Foundation of symbolic interpretation), after an introduction expounding on the necessity, meaning, and importance of *taʾwīl*, turns to a spiritual exegesis of the history of *walāya*, the lives of the prophets and the Imams who succeeded them from the time of Adam through Muḥammad.¹⁷

In the next section I introduce the methodology and details of al-Nuʾmān’s understanding of this sacred history, and conclude with a translation of a representative example, his interpretation of the birth of Jesus as narrated in the Quran (3:42–48; cf. Q 19:16–34).

3 Sacred Biography, Hierohistory, and the Spiritual Hierarchy (*ḥudūd al-dīn*)

Prophetic biography occupied a special place in Islamic historiography, constituting its own genre, known as *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*.¹⁸ Among the most famous exemplars of this genre are al-Thaʿlabī’s (d. 427/1035) *ʿArāʾis al-majālīs* (Brides of the assemblies) and various versions of the stories attributed to an otherwise unknown “al-Kisāʾī.”¹⁹ Often, the prophetic stories were embedded in universal histories, such as the famous *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk* (History of prophets and kings) by al-Nuʾmān’s elder contemporary, al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), which, like many other exemplars of this genre, was meant to edify and instruct the

16 Al-Nuʾmān, *Pillars* i, 16. Translation slightly emended.

17 Al-Nuʾmān, *Asās al-taʾwīl*, ed. Tāmīr, ed. Khaḍḍūr.

18 Al-Kisāʾī, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*; Nagel, *Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ* v, 180–1.

19 Ibid.

reader.²⁰ In this, they followed Quranic precedents, particularly when narrating the lives of the prophets.²¹

Among the Muslim interpreters of prophetic history were those who maintained that these narratives held profound symbolic import. Perhaps the most famous illustration of this is one of Ibn al-ʿArabī's (d. 638/1240) most influential works, the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (Bezels of wisdom), which interprets the teachings of twenty-eight prophets from Adam to Muḥammad.²² It was followed in the same vein by the *Taʾwīl al-aḥādīth fī rumūz qisas al-anbiyāʾ* (Symbolic interpretation of the events in the mysteries of prophetic tales) of the influential Indian reformer Shāh Walī Allāh (d. 1176/1762).²³ The earliest exemplars of this genre, however, appear to be those that were composed under the rule of the Fāṭimids, beginning with the closely related works of Abū l-Qāsim Jaʿfar b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman (d. c. 346/957), the *Sarāʾir al-nuṭaqāʾ* (Secrets of the speakers) and the *Asrār al-nuṭaqāʾ* (Mysteries of the speakers).²⁴ These two works were soon followed by the aforementioned *Asās al-taʾwīl* by al-Nuʿmān.

Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān commences his exposition by explaining that just as a child's physical upbringing involves various stages, so a soul's spiritual training also progresses in degrees.²⁵ A newborn must drink milk and grow strong before eating solid food; so too, it is incumbent on a seeker of knowledge to begin by learning about the formal aspects of the religion (*ẓāhir*) before commencing with the spiritual (*bāṭin*). Thus, al-Nuʿmān found it necessary to compose this book as an extended exposition of the first two sections of his *Daʿāʾim al-Islām*, the chapters on faith (*īmān*) and divine authority (*walāya*).²⁶ As in his other works, he attributes the knowledge in his book to the Imams descended from the Prophet Muḥammad who, he maintains, are the only ones who have the knowledge and authority to expound upon the revelation.²⁷

For al-Nuʿmān and other exponents of the Fāṭimid Imams, the science of symbolic interpretation (*taʾwīl*) was premised on the concept of the spiritual hierarchy (*ḥudūd al-dīn*). The term *ḥadd* (pl. *ḥudūd*) is a technical term that is notoriously difficult to render in English. Definitions of this Arabic word

20 Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrikh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*. Al-Nuʿmān was familiar with this work, as he quotes its author extensively in his *Sharḥ* i, 130ff.

21 In this regard, see Khalafallāh, *al-Fann*.

22 This work has been published in numerous editions and is available in abridged translations in English and French. For bibliographical details, see Ateş, Ibn al-ʿArabī iii, 707–11.

23 Shāh Walī Allāh Dihlawī, *Mystical interpretation*. This work is available in English translation. See also al-Samarrai, Two lists.

24 Hollenberg, Interpretation.

25 Al-Nuʿmān, *Asās al-taʾwīl*, ed. Tāmir 23–6.

26 Cf. Cortese, *Arabic Ismaili manuscripts* 22; al-Nuʿmān, *Asās al-taʾwīl*, ed. Tāmir 27.

27 Al-Nuʿmān, *Asās al-taʾwīl*, ed. Tāmir 31–2.

include edge, border, boundary, limit, extremity, stage, and degree. By extension, the term can mean definition, rank, divine ordinance and, particularly in its Ismāʿīlī usage, esoteric hierarchy. God qua God is beyond any *ḥadd*, that is, anything that could limit or encompass Him.²⁸ He is therefore beyond any “definition,” in the multivalent senses of that word.

In a tradition, the Prophet stated that the first creation of God was the divine pen (*qalam*),²⁹ which is frequently associated with the preserved tablet. Al-Nuʿmān assures us that these two celestial entities are unrelated to pens made from reeds and tablets made from wood. Rather, they are symbols of the highest hierarchs (*ḥadds*) of the Creator. The pen is the source of divine knowledge, while the tablet is its bearer.³⁰ On the physical plane, the *Nāṭiq*, or Speaker (i.e., the Prophet), is the highest hierarch (*ḥadd*) in his time, as is the Imam in his time. Both the Speaker (*nāṭiq*) and the Imam are therefore known as Lord of the Age (*ṣāhib al-ʿaṣr*) or Lord of the Time (*ṣāhib al-zamān*).³¹ Therefore, al-Nuʿmān tells us, the hierarchs are those through whom humankind comes to know the Creator, and their invitation or summons to humankind to recognize God’s sovereignty is known as the *daʿwa*.³²

The six Speakers (*nāṭiqs*) are charged by God with conveying the exoteric, formal aspect of a revealed religion. They include Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad, who each brought a new heavenly scripture in the language of symbols.³³ The seventh Speaker (*nāṭiq*) is the Qāʾim, the Resurrector, who is unique, in that he does not bring a new revelation. Rather, he unveils the inner meaning of all revelation, and represents the pinnacle and purpose of creation. Because of him, the Universal Soul attains completion and reaches the rank of the Universal Intellect.³⁴ Each Speaker (*nāṭiq*)

28 Ibid. 39.

29 Huart et al., *Ḳalam* iv, 471. See al-Nuʿmān, *al-Majālis* 320. On the relationship between the pen (*qalam*) and the intellect (*ʿaql*), see al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Iftikhār* 43 and *Ithbāt al-nubūʿāt* 47.

30 Al-Nuʿmān, *Asās al-taʾwīl*, ed. Tāmīr 39.

31 Ibid. 43, 51; al-Nuʿmān, *Asās al-taʾwīl*, ed. Khaḍḍūr 30. Elsewhere, there appears to be a distinction drawn between *ʿaṣr* and *zamān*. For examples of a differentiation between *dawr* and *zamān*, see Virani, *Days* 76. Al-Nuʿmān explains that the terms *Nāṭiq* and Imam are interchangeable, al-Nuʿmān, *Asās al-taʾwīl*, ed. Tāmīr 52, ed. Khaḍḍūr 31, though in practice, this is infrequent. In this chapter, the titles of those *ḥudūd* who exist only one at a time, such as the *Nāṭiq* and the Imam, are capitalized, while other members of the hierarchy are in lowercase letters.

32 Al-Nuʿmān, *Asās al-taʾwīl*, ed. Tāmīr 39.

33 Ibid. 41.

34 Virani, *Days*, *passim*.

inaugurates an age (*dawr*) of humankind.³⁵ The task of the Imams, by contrast, is to expound upon the esoteric mysteries of the revelation. Below the Speakers (*nātiqs*) and Imams is a spiritual hierarchy charged with guiding humankind to recognize the Creator. All the members of this hierarchy are, in turn, “proof” or “evidence” (*hujja*) of the hierarch (*hadd*) above them, and ultimately of God. Every Speaker (*nātiq*) has a Foundation (*asās*), who is the Speaker’s successor.³⁶ The most senior proof (*hujja*) of the Foundation (*asās*) becomes the Imam, and between each Speaker (*nātiq*) there are regular successions of Imams in cycles of seven. The Speakers and Imams have twelve *lāhiqs*, a word that can mean followers, adjuncts, or appendages, almost in the sense of “flanks” or “limbs.”³⁷ The author says that the *lāhiqs* are also known as *naqībs*, or chiefs, in the Quran.³⁸ While every lower hierarch (*hadd*) is a proof (*hujja*) of the hierarch above, the twelve *lāhiqs* are the ones most commonly referred to as proofs (*hujjas*). They are compared to the celestial angels, of whom four are especially exalted.³⁹ As the *lāhiqs* are like angels and flanks of the Speakers (*nātiqs*) and Imams, they have “wings,” or in Arabic, *janāḥ*. These are the inviters (*dāʿīs*), who call humankind to the recognition of God through the recognition of the hierarchy (*hudūd*).⁴⁰ While these constitute the primary members of the spiritual hierarchy, in certain places al-Nuʿmān provides further subdivisions and names of its members.⁴¹ He compares the hierarchy (*hudūd*) to

35 *Dawr* is a technical term in Ismāʿīlī thought, and is more commonly translated as “cycle”; this has the advantage of reflecting the root meaning of turning or revolving. I have used “age,” to better convey the sense of time in English.

36 See al-Nuʿmān, *Asās al-taʿwīl*, ed. Tāmīr 51, ed. Khaḍḍūr 29–30, where al-Nuʿmān mentions that the *Asās* is also an Imam.

37 Al-Nuʿmān, *Asās al-taʿwīl*, ed. Tāmīr 41, 51, ed. Khaḍḍūr 30.

38 Al-Nuʿmān, *Asās al-taʿwīl*, ed. Tāmīr 51, 59, 85, ed. Khaḍḍūr 30, 38, 64.

39 Al-Nuʿmān, *Asās al-taʿwīl*, ed. Tāmīr 45–6. It seems that al-Nuʿmān occasionally refers only to the elite among the *lāhiqs* or *naqībs* with the epithet *hujja*, presumably in the meaning of the supreme *hujja*, or the four highest ranking *hujjas*, differentiating them by referring to those below them simply as *lāhiqs* or *naqībs*, see *ibid.* 47, 70, 85, 86–7, 103, 104; *Asās al-taʿwīl*, ed. Khaḍḍūr 50, 65, 66, 83, 84. In other places, he seems to distinguish between twelve *lāhiqs* and twelve *naqībs*; *Asās al-taʿwīl*, ed. Tāmīr 221, ed. Khaḍḍūr 204, and between the *hujjas*, *lāhiqs*, and *naqībs* in general *Asās al-taʿwīl*, ed. Tāmīr 244, 249, 260, 263, 267, 270, ed. Khaḍḍūr 228, 233, 244, 248, 253, 256.

40 Al-Nuʿmān, *Asās al-taʿwīl*, ed. Tāmīr 46, 70, 85, ed. Khaḍḍūr 50, 64. Earlier scholars presumed that employment of the term *janāḥ* was limited to the Persian Ismāʿīlī authors of the early Fāṭimid period; see Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs* 219. Al-Nuʿmān’s usage demonstrates that it was more widespread.

41 See, for example, al-Nuʿmān, *Asās al-taʿwīl*, ed. Tāmīr 104–5, ed. Khaḍḍūr 84, where he gives *nātiq*, *asās*, *imām*, *hujja*, *naqīb*, *yad*, *janāḥ*, *maʿdhūn*, and *mustajīb*. The rank of *yad* (hand), may be a special class among the *janāḥs*; see *Asās al-taʿwīl*, ed. Tāmīr 195 and *Asās al-taʿwīl*, ed. Khaḍḍūr 177, though this reference could be a unique case related to the

a mighty, life-giving river of knowledge, bestowing its bounty on the believers, who flourish like trees on the banks of the river.⁴² To him, the symbolic interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of scripture, religious practice, sacred history, and the universe reveals the underlying hierarchy of creation, and leads to recognition of the Creator.⁴³

To explain why symbolic interpretation must be applied to the events in the biographies of the prophets (rather than just using it to explain anthropomorphic descriptions of God), al-Nu'mān cites the narration of the life of Joseph in the Quran. Joseph is told, "Thus your lord will choose you and teach you the symbolic interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of events (*aḥādīth*)" (Q 12:6). In another passage, the Quran states, "Thus we settled Joseph on earth and taught him the symbolic interpretation of events" (Q 12:21).⁴⁴ On the basis of Quranic verses such as these, al-Nu'mān asserts the need to understand the symbolism behind these sacred biographies.⁴⁵

4 Background to the Translation

The sample passage I translate here is the beginning of the fifth chapter of *Asās al-ta'wīl*, which examines the birth of Jesus. Unlike what we might expect from a prophetic history, this is not an exposition of a virgin birth. As elaborated above, to al-Nu'mān the events narrated in the Quran are imbued with symbolic value relating to the spiritual hierarchy. In this particular narrative, which expounds upon the Quran 3:42–48 (*Āl Imrān*, or the Family of Joachim), we are told that the allusion to Mary, the mother of Jesus, is not a reference to Jesus's physical mother, but rather to his "spiritual mother," the *lāhiq* who nurtured and taught him, preparing him for his task as one of God's great prophets and the Speaker (*nāṭiq*) of a new age of humankind. As the age of Moses approached completion, Joachim (Imrān), the physical father

Asās. The role and possible number of the *ma'dhūns* is mentioned in *Asās al-ta'wīl*, ed. Tāmīr 257, ed. Khaḍḍūr 241. References to the *bāb*, defined as the successor in revealing *ta'wīl*, are found in *Asās al-ta'wīl*, ed. Tāmīr 167, 169, ed. Khaḍḍūr 149, 151. In *Asās al-ta'wīl*, ed. Tāmīr 171, ed. Khaḍḍūr 236, the *bāb* appears to be defined as the supreme *ḥujja*, and the rank of *ma'dhūn* is mentioned, while in *Asās al-ta'wīl*, ed. Tāmīr 190, ed. Khaḍḍūr 171 the *bābs* are identified as the four highest ranking *ḥujjas*. For the *khalīfas* as Imams, see *Asās al-ta'wīl*, ed. Tāmīr 261, ed. Khaḍḍūr 246.

42 Al-Nu'mān, *Asās al-ta'wīl*, ed. Tāmīr 43.

43 For more detailed expositions of the hierarchy, see Virani, *Days*, passim and 73–6, 159–60.

44 Al-Nu'mān, *Asās al-ta'wīl*, ed. Tāmīr 31.

45 In one place, he also indicates that these "events" (*aḥādīth*) refer to the revealed books; *ibid.* 135; *Asās al-ta'wīl*, ed. Khaḍḍūr 117.

of the Mary who gave birth to Jesus, was the Imam of the Time. His successor to the *imāma* was Zechariah (Zakariyyā), who was succeeded by John the Baptist (Yaḥyā l-Maʿmadān), the last Imam of the age of Moses. Joachim had an esteemed *lāḥiq*, whom he entrusted to Zechariah for training. While this *lāḥiq* was highly knowledgeable, he was not capable of assuming the mantle of *imāma*. Thus, Zechariah's successor to the *imāma* was his other *lāḥiq*, John the Baptist. Prophecy, however, remained in the direct line of Joachim. His daughter Mary gave birth to Jesus, the Messiah. Al-Nu'mān informs us that Jesus was from the pure progeny of Abraham through his mother Mary, just as the sons of 'Alī and Fāṭima were from the pure progeny of Muḥammad through Fāṭima.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, Joachim's *lāḥiq* became a "spiritual Mary," who mothered Jesus in the training of the *da'wa*. It is this latter Mary, al-Nu'mān informs us, who is referred to in the symbolic interpretation of this Quranic passage.

The case of "Mary" is not unique in al-Nu'mān's exegesis. The allusion to the mother of Moses in the following Quranic verse, interpreted allegorically, is said to refer to the *dā'ī* who invited and nurtured him, rather than to his physical mother:⁴⁷ "We inspired the mother of Moses: 'Suckle him; but if you fear for him, cast him into the river and neither fear nor grieve. We shall restore him to you and make him one of the messengers.'" (Q 28:7).

In the translation that follows, I have adopted the English names of the well-known personalities, and included the Arabic equivalents in parentheses on the first occurrence. This is especially necessary since there is often a lack of consensus on the equivalents of some lesser-known figures. For example, the biblical Amram, father of Moses, is 'Imrān in Arabic. However, the Quranic name 'Imrān also refers to the father of Mary, generally recognized as Joachim in the Christian tradition, though this name is not mentioned in the canonical gospels.⁴⁸ The pronouns are correlated with their referents and interpolated in the translation.

Al-Nu'mān's audience would have been intimately conversant with the Quranic passages and stories he narrates. Many of his readers had likely memorized the entire holy book, or substantial portions of it, and so his allusions are often brief, as he assumes their familiarity. Below is the full text of the Quranic passage that narrates the prophetic history he explores; the sections he does not quote appear in square brackets.⁴⁹

46 Al-Nu'mān, *Asās al-ta'wīl*, ed. Tāmir 94, ed. Khaḍḍūr 73.

47 Al-Nu'mān, *Asās al-ta'wīl*, ed. Tāmir 180, ed. Khaḍḍūr 161.

48 Asselin, Anne and Joachim 468–70.

49 All translations from the Quran are my own, and have naturally benefited from the several published English translations available.

When the angels said: O Mary! Lo! God has chosen you, purified you, and preferred you above the women of the worlds (3:42).

O Mary! Submit to your Lord. Prostrate and bow down [with those who bow down] (3:43).

That is of the tidings of the unseen that We reveal to you (O Muḥammad). [You were not with them when they cast lots with their pens to see who would look after Mary, nor were you with them when they disputed] (3:44).

When the angels said: O Mary! Lo! God conveys glad tidings to you of a word from Him. His name is the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary. He shall be distinguished in the world and the hereafter, and of those brought near (3:45).

He will speak to the people in the cradle and in maturity, [and is one of the righteous] (3:46).

She said: Lord! How can I have a child when no man has touched me? He said: Such is God. He creates what He wills. If He decrees a thing, He but says to it Be! and it is (3:47).

And He will teach him the book and the wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel (3:48).

The following two passages from the Quran (19:2–9 and 3:33–37) are also useful in understanding references to Joachim's ('Imrān's) descendants, their relationship to Zechariah's (Zakariyyā's) descendants, and the prayers of Joachim and Zechariah that are alluded to in al-Nu'man's spiritual exegesis.

The mention of your Lord's mercy to His servant Zechariah: (19:2)

When he secretly called to his Lord, (19:3)

saying, "My Lord, indeed my bones are enfeebled and the hairs upon my head hoary. Hitherto, never have I been disappointed in supplicating to You, my Lord. (19:4)

Indeed, I fear for the successors to authority (*mawālī*) after me. My wife is barren, so give me from Yourself an heir (*walī*), (19:5)

who will inherit me and inherit from the House of Jacob (Ya'qūb), my Lord, making him well-pleasing." (19:6)

"O Zechariah, indeed, We give you glad tidings of a lad whose name is John, a name We have not assigned aforetime." (19:7)

He said, "My Lord, how will I have a son when my wife is barren and I have reached extreme old age?" (19:8)

He said, "So shall it be. Your Lord says, 'Easy be it for Me, for I created you aforetime, when you were naught.'" (19:9)

• • •

Indeed, God chose Adam, Noah, the House of Abraham and the House of Joachim (ʿImrān) over the worlds, (3:33)

descendants, one after the other. God hears and knows. (3:34)

When Joachim's wife said, "Lord, I have dedicated unto you what is in my womb, consecrated, so accept this from me. Indeed, You hear and know." (3:35)

When she delivered her, she said, "Lord, I have given birth to a female." God knew best what she had delivered—the male is not as the female. "I have named her Mary, and entrust her and her descendants to Your protection against the accursed Satan." (3:36)

Her Lord accepted the child with gracious favor, and caused her to grow in goodness, entrusting her to Zechariah for nurturing. Whenever Zechariah entered upon her in the sanctuary, he found her with provisions. "O Mary," he asked, "how does this come to you?" "From God," she replied. "Indeed, God provisions whomsoever He will without reckoning." (3:37)

Several manuscripts of Qāḍī l-Nu'mān's Arabic *Asās al-ta'wīl* are extant, as is an early Persian translation attributed to al-Mu'ayyad fī l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, and it is clear that it was a highly esteemed book.⁵⁰ ʿĀrif Tāmīr prepared an edition in 1960 on the basis of two manuscripts, one from Maṣyāf, Syria, and the second from Kampala, Uganda.⁵¹ Ḥusām Khaḍḍūr issued an updated edition in 2008. This incorporates minor improvements to the text established by Tāmīr, but is missing the introduction (*muqaddima*) by al-Nu'mān, along with some other passages.⁵² Both editions available to me appear to be recent reprints, and it is possible that Khaḍḍūr's original edition may have included the introduction. Many passages in the printed texts have been corrupted, and so I collated a copy of a manuscript produced in Surat, India in 1349/1931 with the Tāmīr/Khaḍḍūr edition. In addition, I used two manuscripts of the Persian translation of the *Asās al-ta'wīl* to reconstruct ambiguous passages. One of the

50 The manuscripts are referenced in Poonawala, *Biobibliography* 63–4; Cortese, *Ismaili* 48–9 and *Arabic Ismaili manuscripts* 22–3.

51 Poonawala, *Biobibliography* 63.

52 Al-Nu'mān, *Asās al-ta'wīl*, ed. Khaḍḍūr.

Persian manuscripts is from Udaipur, India and dated 1308/1890, while the second is of unknown provenance. After this article was written, I came into possession of a copy of a third Persian manuscript, dated 1300/1883, and copies of additional Arabic manuscripts currently in the possession of the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London.⁵³

5 Translation of the Tale of the Birth of Jesus (Q 3:42–48) in Qāḍī l-Nu‘mān’s *Asās al-ta’wīl*

In the name of God, the Compassionate the Merciful.

When the age of Moses (Mūsā) drew to a close, with John the Baptist (Yaḥyā) being the last Imam of this cycle, God wished to send a fifth messenger. This was Jesus (ʿĪsā). What follows is the symbolic interpretation (*ta’wīl*) of this.⁵⁴

We shall begin the discourse by mentioning Mary (Maryam), the spiritual mother of Jesus. He [Mary]⁵⁵ was one of the *lāḥiqs* of Joachim (ʿImrān), the Imam of the Time (*ṣāḥib al-zamān*) before Zechariah (Zakariyyā). Joachim appointed Zechariah (as the next Imam) and entrusted to him his *lāḥiq* who was called “Mary” in an esoteric sense. He did this because he wanted Mary to become Zechariah’s proof (*ḥujja*), since Mary was an adherent of his *daʿwa*, while Zechariah was not. However, he needed to appoint Zechariah, since he saw that his *lāḥiq*, Mary, had insufficient power for the *imāma*. Joachim found that Mary was more suited to being a proof (*ḥujja*), and so Zechariah appointed Mary as one of his proofs, entrusting the authority (of *imāma*) to John the Baptist, who adhered to his invitation (*daʿwa*), so the authority (of *imāma*) would remain in his invitation (*daʿwa*) after him.⁵⁶

Now we intend to narrate the tale of the spiritual birth (*mīlād al-bāṭin*) of Jesus, which is the birth of the invitation (*daʿwa*), rather than his physical birth (*mīlād al-ẓāhir*). The latter is what the people of superficial forms take it to

53 The text of the manuscript dated 1300/1883 and described in Cortese, *Arabic Ismaili manuscripts* 199, and illustrated on page 138h was not available to me. One of the copies in my possession is the same as the text described in de Blois, *Arabic, Persian* 39–40, where full bibliographical details are provided.

54 It is likely that this paragraph was inserted into the text by Tāmir as an editor’s note and was copied by Khaḍḍūr, as it does not exist in the Arabic manuscript or in the Persian translation.

55 As is clear here and elsewhere, “Mary” is used as a name symbolizing an esoteric hierarchy, and alluded to in Qāḍī l-Nu‘mān’s text by the masculine pronoun “he.”

56 The preceding paragraph is corrupt in the existing editions, so I have translated it primarily from the manuscripts.

mean, neither knowing its spiritual significance, nor acknowledging the need for the spiritual interpretation, which is as follows.

When Zechariah entrusted the divine authority (of the *imāma*) to John the Baptist, he wished John's proof (*ḥujja*) to be from his (own) invitation (*daʿwa*).

As God (may He be hallowed) says in His Book, after fulfilling Zechariah's prayer by blessing him with John the Baptist, entrusting *imāma* to John after him, He intended to fulfill Joachim's desire and supplication that a prophet would emerge from his invitation (*daʿwa*). He thus spiritually inspired Joachim's *lāḥiq*, who was metaphorically referred to as "Mary, mother of Jesus." The *lāḥiq* was known esoterically by this matronym (*kunya*) because Joachim had entrusted Jesus to him (for instruction), just as Zechariah had once nurtured Mary.

Zechariah appointed John only after requesting that the divine authority (of *imāma*) be in his progeny and among the adherents of his invitation (*daʿwa*). Without Zechariah and his proof (*ḥujja*) John being aware of it, the *lāḥiq* called Mary received spiritual inspiration (*mādda*) from God. This was in his age-old capacity among the ranks of the *lāḥiqs*. While his capability for elucidation (*bayān*) was insufficient to advance him to the rank (*ḥadd*) of Imam, he remained at his previous station (of *lāḥiq*).

The celestial hierarchs (*al-ḥudūd al-ʿulwīyya*) from God communicated with Mary, giving him glad tidings of the virtue and honor that God had conferred upon him over the other *lāḥiqs*. They commanded him to believe in Zechariah's *imāma* and to follow him, and never to disobey the Imam of the Time.⁵⁷ As God, may He be exalted, says:

When the angels said: O Mary! Lo! God has chosen you, purified you, and preferred you above the women of the worlds. (Q 3:42)

The women of the worlds meaning the *lāḥiqs*.

O Mary! Submit to your lord. (Q 3:43)

That is, establish the invitation to the Imam of your time.

Prostrate. (Q 3:43)

That is, obey him.

⁵⁷ In the *Bunyād*, John is mentioned, rather than Zechariah.

And bow down. (Q 3:43)

That is, humble yourself before the rank (*ḥadd*) of your Foundation (*asās*).

That is of the tidings of the unseen that we reveal to you (O Muḥammad).
(Q 3:44)

He said this to Muḥammad, indicating that He was divulging to him a matter that was hidden.

The angels then conveyed glad tidings to that *lāḥiq*, Mary, telling him that he would invite a man who would respond to his call to believe. The man's station would be exalted, and he would become a prophet after him, a Speaker (*nāṭiq*) of a revealed religion (*sharī'a*). Prophethood would issue from the offspring of his invitation (*da'wa*). As God says:

When the angels said: O Mary! Lo! God conveys glad tidings to you of a word from Him. His name is the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary. He shall be distinguished in the world and the hereafter, and of those brought near.
(Q 3:45)

So He openly informed [Muḥammad] of the names of that respondent and his mother. If Jesus's mother Mary were the one being addressed, as the people of superficial forms allege, mentioning her name here would be meaningless. The fact that she is addressed in the passage dispenses with the need for such a mention. After all, if a woman is told that she will give birth to a son whose name is such-and-such, who is your son, the statement would be senseless, because telling her that she would give birth to him presupposes that she is his mother. Clearly, a woman who gives birth to a child is well aware that the child is hers.

God's saying: "of a word from Him" (Q 3:45), indicates that he will be a prophet. The prophets of God are His "words" because by His command they convey His message to His worshipers. This is why the Quran is called the "Word of God" (*kalām Allāh*). The Messenger's utterance of it elucidates God's will to the people, as is the case with all the other books God revealed. Those who imagine that these words of God resemble their own verbal utterances or the utterances of other human beings liken God to His creatures. May God be exalted far above such things!

His saying, "His name is the Messiah" (*al-masīḥ*) (Q 3:45) means that he "polishes" or "clears" (*yamsaḥ*) the apparent (*ẓāhir*) and the hidden (*bāṭin*). In Arabic, the term *masḥ* means to clear, remove, or wipe away something.

This is why we pray for the sick by saying *masaḥa llāh ḍarrak*, or “may God remove (*masaḥa*) your ailment,” in the sense of, “may He remove it from you and purge you of its affliction.” In this manner, Jesus removed (*masaḥa*) the impurities of those who responded to him, that is, the ailments of their faith, whether apparent (*ẓāhir*) or hidden (*bāṭin*). This is why he is called a *masīḥ* or “messiah”; and he too was clear and pure of such things.

God’s saying: “distinguished in the world and the hereafter” (Q 3:45) means he will have a lofty position in both these places—in this corporeal world with the prophethood and the messengership, and in the hereafter with his connection to the celestial hierarchy (*al-ḥudūd al-ʿulwīyya*).

“And of those brought near” (Q 3:45) refers to his proximity to those hierarchs (*ḥadds*).

“He will speak to the people in the cradle” (Q 3:46) means that while still in training, before maturing to the ranks of conversing with those who have already reached the stage of being given leave to speak, he will discourse with those who are intimately familiar with spiritual wisdom.⁵⁸

“And in maturity” (Q 3:46), means he will continue doing that after he matures.

As a youth, he will reach the level of elucidation (*bayān*) resembling that of the *janāḥs*, and upon reaching maturity, resembling that of the *lāḥiqs*. This is all because of his mastery of elucidation, knowledge, and wisdom.

She said: Lord! How can I have a child when no man has touched me?
(Q 3:47)

In other words, the *lāḥiq* called Mary asked the angel, “How can I conduct the invitation (*daʿwa*) when the Imam of the Time has not given me permission to do so?”

And in another verse: “neither have I been unchaste” (Q 19:20), meaning, “Nor shall I be unfaithful by acting without his command.”

He said: Such is God. He creates what He wills. (Q 3:47)

In addressing him, one of the celestial hierarchs said, “Not all that God (may He be exalted and glorified) creates accords with what you have perceived from His past practice in many situations. In other words, He vouchsafes knowledge

⁵⁸ Adopting the interpretation in the *Bunyād, sukhan gūyad kisānī-rā ki bā ḥikmat uns dārand*. On the technical meaning of the word wisdom (*ḥikma*) in Ismāʿīlī works, See Virani, Persian poetry 38–41.

of the creation of religion to none save the Imam and the proof (*ḥujja*). Rather, God causes to pass what He wills.”

And his saying,

If He decrees a thing, He but says to it Be! and it is. And He will teach him the book. (Q 3:47–48)

In other words, after this He will grant spiritual recognition of the Imam of the Time, to whom submission is due.

And the wisdom. (Q 3:48)

That is to say, the knowledge with which other Speakers (*nāṭiqs*) like him were distinguished.

And the Torah (Q 3:48), meaning the exoteric (*ẓāhir*).

And the Gospel (Q 3:48), meaning the esoteric (*bāṭin*).

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Shaping a Millennial Historiography in Persianate South Asia: the *Sīrat* of Bandagī Miyān Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān

Derryl N. MacLean

In the year 902/1496, shortly after the beginning of the Muslim tenth century, an elderly Chishtī Sufi from north India arrived in Gujarat with a small group of disciples and took up residence at the mosque of Tāj Khān Sālār in Ahmadabad. The man was Sayyid Muḥammad Jawnpūrī, and he would begin preaching publicly an intensified mystical version of Islam focused on the purification of self and society at what was the end of the first Muslim millennium. Not long thereafter, he would be expelled from the city by Sultan Maḥmūd Begra (d. 917/1511), due to increasing alarm over the political implications of this millennial vision. Sayyid Muḥammad would travel to Barlī, a small village just outside Pātan, where the implications of his revitalized Islam would crystallize. “You are the promised Mahdī,” God told him, “proclaim the manifestation of your Mahdship, and do not fear the people.”¹

Sayyid Muḥammad would take this charge seriously, and a series of heated exchanges would break out over the nature and implications of the claim to be Mahdī (“the rightly-guided one”), an eschatological figure who, it was widely believed, would usher in the events of the last days. Sayyid Muḥammad’s position became increasingly untenable, and he would eventually be expelled from Gujarat. By this time, he had already convinced a diverse and devoted group of primarily Afghans and Maliks (Gujarati gentry) of the truth of his position on both Islam and time. The short remainder of his life would be spent in emigration, looking for a place and a people that would permit the realization of his view of Islam at the end of the first millennium. At one point, it looked as if this would be the Sindh of Jām Nanda (d. 915/1509) or the Arghūn Qandahār of Shāh Beg (d. 930/1524) and Mīr Dhū l-Nūn (d. 913/1507). This was not to be, and the Mahdī would pass away on 19 Dhū l-Qa‘da 910/23 April 1505 in exile in the small town of Farāh on the present-day border of Afghanistan with Iran.

1 Valī, *Inṣāf-nāma* 12. For a short overview on the life of the Mahdī and the early generation of the Mahdavis, see MacLean, *Sociology* 150–68. The most complete modern biography of the Mahdī in Urdu is Maḥmūdī, *al-Mahdī l-mawūd*.

After his death, the followers of the Mahdī would disperse into three locations to work out the implications of a deceased Mahdī: Balūchistān where the movement would rapidly become the ethnic Islam of the Dhikrī Balūch of Makrān and lose its Mahdavi identity over time;² Sindh where it would associate closely with Sufi orders and identify primarily as an adhesive mystical order;³ and Gujarat. It was Gujarat that would constitute the most important region for the movement's political, intellectual, and devotional production, and from whence it would expand ephemerally into north India and more permanently into the Deccan, where it has survived until the present.⁴ The apocalyptic urgency of the first generation of what would become the movement known in retrospect as the Mahdaviyya was expressed in a complex but sparse literature of ecstatic poetry, edicts of internal authority, fragmentary letters, creed production, and short defenses of the nature of the Mahdīship.⁵ Writing the biography of the Mahdī was not a part of the initial phase of the movement, and references to the person of Sayyid Muḥammad Jawnpūrī are intertwined as traditions locating eschatology or disputing authority within certain lineages, but they do not provide a historical narrative and only the hint of a context.

Around fifty years after the death of the Mahdī, it began to become clear to the Mahdavis that the end of the mundane world was not imminent. At this juncture, the community felt the need to reflect on the biography of the Mahdī as a devotional buttress to living in a prolonged end period. Three different solutions to the problem of messianic biography emerged, each tied to an early Mahdavi scholar: Bandaḡī Miyān Valī b. Yūsuf, Maṣṣūr Khān Burhānpūrī, and Bandaḡī Miyān Shāh 'Abd al-Raḥmān.

The solution of Bandaḡī Miyān Valī b. Yūsuf is found most directly in his terse *Hujjat al-munṣafīn*, but also in his much larger *Inṣāf-nāma* and its associated *Hāshiyya*.⁶ All three sources belong to the tradition of nucleated discourse that dates back to the first generation of Mahdavis. In this type of narrative, the sayings (*nuqūl*, sing., *naql*) of the Mahdī are compiled and then rearranged under specific subjects with didactic and devotional intentions. The very short *Hujjat al-munṣafīn* (Proof of the equitable) contains a fragmentary and not very forthcoming chronological biography of the Mahdī, followed and entangled

2 See Pastner, Feuding with the spirit 302–9. The Mahdavi connection is disputed by Badalkhan, *Zikri* dilemmas 293–326. For a recent Dhikrī account, see Balūch, *Dhikrī firqa kī tārikh*.

3 Siddiqi, Mahdi of Jaunpur in Sind 101–9.

4 Qamar Uddin, Palanpur 232–57; Ansari, Indo Persian literature 72–8.

5 See, for example, the many fragmentary works of Bandaḡī Miyān Sayyid Khūndmīr (d. 930/1523), such as *Maktūb-i Multānī* and *Umm al-'aḡā'id*.

6 Valī, *Hujjat*; Valī, *Hāshiyya*; Valī, *Inṣāf-nāma*.

by the textual proofs for the Mahdīship. The much longer *Inṣāf-nāma* (Book of equity) scatters biographical data throughout many chapters, arranged according to themes and not chronology, while its *Hāshiyya* (Commentary) simply compiles traditions of the Mahdī and the first generation of Mahdavis without any apparent system of organization. All three of these works by Valī reflect the pre-existing Indian genre of *maḥfūẓāt* (the “table talk” of Sufis),⁷ and he had access to traditions through his father Yūsuf, one of the original disciples of the Mahdī. The *Hujjat* and the *Hāshiyya* mostly will be forgotten by Mahdavis, but the *Inṣāf-nāma*, while neither biography nor history, will serve as a major source for all subsequent Mahdavi biographies and histories, especially within the genre of *naqliyyāt* (compilations of traditions), which continues from Persian into Urdu up to the present.⁸ All three sources signal the critical concern of this transitional generation for the issue of *inṣāf* (equity), understood as a state openness to the social implications of the Mahdīship.

The second attempt to solve the problem of messianic biography was made by Maṣṣūr Khān b. Haybat Khān Burhānpūrī in his isolated *Jannat al-vilāyat* (Garden of messianic authority).⁹ Written in the form of a letter to a non-Mahdavi brother requesting information on the movement, it combines the quality of epistles (*maktūbāt*), biography (*tadhkirat*), and disputation (*mubāḥasat*), ending like Valī’s *Hujjat* with a detailed proof of the Mahdīship. The biography is important to historians for the variant traditions it contains, some of which are unique to the *Jannat*, and its social location within a non-Sayyid lineage and a non-Chishtī background. The *Jannat* also indicates the difficulty the Mahdavis had with conceptualizing and writing a specific biography of the Mahdī within a particular genre, without tying it to questions of the disputation of the Mahdīship itself. This biography was not popular among Mahdavis nor did it serve as an exemplar for subsequent devotional literature produced in Arabic, Persian, or Urdu.

The third and most successful biographical solution, and the subject of this paper, is that of Bandaḡī Miyān Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān.¹⁰ His purported father, Shāh Nizām (d. c. 940/1533), was an early convert at the hands of the Mahdī, one of the most influential initial companions, and the fourth successor (*khalīfa*) to the Mahdī himself. Shāh Nizām himself clearly emerged from a mainstream Chishtī milieu, and is alleged to have been a descendant of Bābā

7 For this important South Asian genre, consult Steinfels, *His master’s voice* 56–69.

8 See, for example, Bandaḡī Miyān Sayyid ‘Ālim, *Naqliyyāt*, written by the great-grandson of the Mahdī.

9 Burhānpūrī, *Jannat*. The printed text is just 104 pages.

10 Biographical data on Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān is sparse and contradictory. See Sulaymān, *Khatam* iii, 254. For the various traditions of Shāh Nizām, see Sayyidan, *Tadhkirat* 250–4.

Farīd Ganj-i Shakar of Pākpatan, although a minority tradition holds out for the equally renowned Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā' of Delhi. We know very little of Shāh 'Abd al-Raḥmān himself, although he lived at Rādhānpūr and other places in the Mahdavi belt of central Gujarat, perhaps moving southward to Khāndesh in the Deccan toward the end of his life. It seems likely that he reflects the oral tradition constructed in the *dā'iras* (lit., circles, i.e., residential communities) of Shāh Nizām as well as the fifth Mahdavi *khalīfa*, Shāh Dilāvar (d. 944/1527).¹¹ Shāh 'Abd al-Raḥmān's book preserves a larger volume of north Indian and Chishtī information and perspectives than that of either Shāh Valī or Burhānpūrī.

The full title of the biography is *Sīrat-i imām mahdī maw'ūd khalīfatallāh hamsar-i rasūl allāh ṣalā allāh 'alayhumā wa-salam* (Biography of the expected Imām Mahdī, the caliph of God, equal to the Messenger of God, may the blessings and peace of God be on them both), and boldly signals its intentions. It is written in a clear and uncomplicated Persian, with a minimum of Arabic and Hindi text, and consists of one continuous chronological narrative from conception to death. The text begins abruptly, after short preliminaries:

To begin, the mother of Ḥaḍrat Mīrān [the Mahdī], on whom be peace, the seemingly, the virtuous, the pure, the devout, the Rābi'a, the worshipper, the abstinent, the orthodox, the generous, the learned, the esteemed person whose name is Bībī Āmina, was always praying at night, fasting by day, and awakening at night. Once, in the third night of her pregnancy, she saw the moon fall from the sky—some say it was the sun. It entered the collar of the Bībī's shirt and exited from her sleeve, augmenting the luminosity of the light of everything it touched. She immediately lost her senses and became absorbed in a divine ecstasy (*jadhbat-yi ḥaqq*).¹²

In the analysis that follows, I wish to understand the extraordinarily successful process of writing a biography of the Mahdī in the *Sīrat*, the foundation for all subsequent biographies and histories within the community. I am particularly concerned with the evocation, transformation, and erasure of existing genres,

11 A short letter from 'Abd al-Raḥmān to Shāh Dilāvar offering spiritual support has survived and is in 'Abd al-Raḥmān, *Maktūb* 15–6. Shāh Dilāvar and Shāh Nizām were both from north India, and thus would have had access to early anecdotes of the Mahdī, if we accept that this relationship existed.

12 All references to Shāh 'Abd al-Raḥmān's *Sīrat* are to the printing of 1368/1948 by the Jam'iyyat-i Mahdaviyya of Zamīstānpūr and given parenthetically in the body of the paper. The Rābi'a of the quotation would appear to refer to Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya, the well-known mystic of Basra (d. 185/801).

qualities, and assumptions within a millennial imaginary. I will focus on five of these: (1) *mahdiyyat* (the qualities absorbed from eschatological *ḥadīth* literature); (2) *nabūvat* (qualities absorbed from prophetic biography); (3) *vilāyat* (qualities absorbed from the Indian Sufi tradition of charismatic *pīrs*); (4) *siyāsat* (qualities related to political authority); and (5) *ziyārat* / *ḥajj* / *hijrat* (qualities related to space and movement, namely pilgrimages to local saints, the pilgrimage to Mecca, and messianic emigrations). I will conclude with some reflections on the nature of the source, its social context, and its larger implications. While the Mahdavis are a relatively small group,¹³ the process of writing the Mahdī reveals much about the construction of devotion, authority, and community in Persianate India in the tenth/sixteenth century.

1 *Mahdiyyat*

In many ways, the entire *Sīrat* is designed to provide a biographical narrative supporting the belief that the historical Sayyid Muḥammad Jawnpūrī was the Mahdī expected universally by Muslims, but my concern here is very specifically to the evocation of the qualities of the Mahdīship as noted in the *ḥadīth* literature.¹⁴ The *Sīrat* inherits this concern with proof texts from the first Mahdāvī generation, but transfers it to a chronological sequence, while at the same time expanding the number of examples and making them more explicit within an over-arching narrative. The process works by taking expectations of the Mahdī as found within a large variety of *ḥadīths*, and then narrating this material within a biographical framework.

Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān performs this textual maneuver variously. The most prominent method involves inserting elements from the *ḥadīth* literature into specific moments of the life of Sayyid Muḥammad Jawnpūrī. Thus, the physical features of Sayyid Muḥammad are said to correspond exactly to those expected by the *ḥadīth* (pp. 10–1): physically, he has a broad forehead, a long nose, and connected eyebrows, and his name and the name of his father and mother are the same as those of the Prophet, as is to be expected of a Mahdī. Exemplifications of *ḥadīth* are not particularly subtle in the *Sīrat*: the biographical description is bold and, almost invariably, is followed by the relevant

13 We do not have a clear idea of the population of Mahdavis, but I would estimate that, excluding the Dhikrīs, there are currently between 150,000 and 300,000, from Sindh through Gujarat and into the Deccan. For an insider’s account of the geographic distribution of the Mahdavis, see Tashrīfīllāhī, *Muqaddima-yi sirāj* 243–532.

14 For an overview of the complex Muslim apocalyptic, see Cook, *Studies*.

ḥadīth, in case the reader missed the connection. The general reference is usually plotted within a specific event as part of the exemplary messianic life and given details. For example, the well-known *ḥadīth* referring to the Mahdī's distribution of unlimited wealth is located by the *Sīrat* in the city of Māndū, ruled by Ghiyāth al-Dīn (d. 906/1500), and then narrated with an additional Sufi lesson on the rejection of wealth and power (p. 46). This tendency to mystify the *ḥadīth* texts concerning the Mahdī, while still insisting on their reality, is apparent throughout the biography, and probably draws on the Chishtī perspectives of Shāh 'Abd al-Raḥmān and his sources.

The author demonstrates continuity with the disputation literature of the first generation of Mahdavis, which was aimed at the conversion or persuasion of non-Mahdavis, in his choice of *ḥadīth* texts and their rationalization, although he then specifies and amplifies the occasion of the fulfillment of the text. This is especially salient in the interrogation of the Mahdī by the 'ulamā' of Gujarat, which is placed in the biography shortly after the declaration of Mahdīship (pp. 88–92).¹⁵ Thus, for example, the *Sīrat* has Sayyid Muḥammad Jawnpūrī responding to the criticism that a *ḥadīth* anticipates that everyone will follow the Mahdī at the end times and that this has not happened in his case, with the explanation that all the *mu'minān* (believing Muslims) have indeed accepted the Mahdī, although the *kāfirān* have not (pp. 88–9). By *kāfirān*, of course, Shāh 'Abd al-Raḥmān here means those Muslims who have not accepted the Mahdīship of Sayyid Muḥammad, and most definitely not Hindus, the usual *kāfirān* of India.

Perhaps even more tellingly in the Indian context, the 'ulamā' assail Sayyid Muḥammad on the grounds of the *ḥadīth* expectations that the name of the promised Mahdī would be Muḥammad ibn ('ibn,' or "son of") 'Abdallāh, whereas his name was Muḥammad the son of Sayyid Khān. Sayyid Muḥammad initially replies aggressively, "Ask God Almighty why he has chosen Muḥammad the son of Sayyid Khān as the Mahdī, for He determines what He wishes" (p. 88). A more sophisticated textual argument is then advanced which suggests that the father of the Prophet could not be named 'Abdallāh ("servant of God") since he was a polytheist (*mushrik*). Thus, the original *ḥadīth* text must have had Muḥammad 'abd Allāh ("Muḥammad the servant of God"), and a copyist in error added the *ibn* ("son of"). Sayyid Muḥammad concludes that he, the Mahdī, is equally the "servant of God," and thus fulfills the textual expectations.

15 This discussion, already intimated by Valī, *Inṣāf-nāma* 12–4, 34, is a feature of subsequent biographies. See, e.g., Burhān al-Dīn, *Shavāhid al-vilāyat* 176–84, written in 1052/1642.

Ḥadīth texts are not simply exemplified untransformed in the narrative, but they are very clearly selected and shaped, with some obvious omissions. In particular, the eschatological traditions of *qiyāma* (the final “resurrection”), *yawm al-dīn* (day of judgment), or the *dajjāl* (the “deceiver” who ushers in the end of time) are conspicuous by their absence. Indeed, the author chooses *ḥadīths* and provides explanations that moderate the reader’s immediate expectations of an end time, while still insisting on the historical accuracy of a righteous community founded on the authority of the Prophet and the charisma of a Mahdī who embodied in his person and exemplified by his actions the predictions of the corpus of the *ḥadīth*.

2 *Nabūvat*

While the *Sīrat* is primarily concerned with exemplifying or expanding messianic traditions, it also wishes to associate the biography of Sayyid Muḥammad Jawnpūrī with that of the Prophet Muḥammad. Indeed, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān’s biography is boldly titled *Sīrat*, which as a genre refers specifically to the biography of the Prophet, and the text’s original subtitle *hamsar-i rasūl allāh* (“equal to the Messenger of God”) makes the connection between the two explicit.¹⁶ Clearly, the author intends to position the two Muḥammads—Muḥammad the Prophet and Muḥammad the Mahdī—in close spiritual proximity. From the first paragraph, the *Sīrat* signals that the messianic imaginary belongs to the popular genre of prophetic biography with decisive comparisons: the clarifying light during pregnancy, the shattering of idols, the birth on a Monday, and other evocative data and images (pp. 4–12). These comparisons are not particularly subtle, at least not in the introduction. Sayyid Muḥammad is quoted as saying, “Whatever God Almighty gave to Muḥammad, He gave also to me, and whatever He gave to me, He previously gave to Muḥammad. He did not give it to anyone prior to Muḥammad nor will He give it to anyone after me” (p. 8). The section ends with the bold statement that the Prophet and the Mahdī were essentially the same (*bi-‘aynihi hamchun*) in both their biographies (*sīrat*) and their physical forms (*ṣūrat*), quoting Sayyid Muḥammad to the effect that if he and the Prophet had lived at the same time, no one would have been able to tell them apart (pp. 10–1). There follows a lengthy description of the physical characteristics shared by the Prophet and the Mahdī, including such well-known qualities as a broad forehead, wheat-colored complexion,

16 For a discussion of the genre of *Sīra* that includes South Asian biographical conventions, see Schimmel, *Muhammad*.

large black eyes with luminous yet reddish whites, joined eyebrows, an aquiline nose, and other features (pp. 11–5).

Apart from the explicit comparisons found in the introduction, there are few evocations of prophetic biography, except in the account of the Mahdī's sojourn in Sindh, where the Mahdavis clearly expected to find support from a class of *anṣār* ("helpers"), similar to that of the Prophet in Medina after his emigration from Mecca. Among other examples, outside the city of Thatta, the Mahdavis constructed a defensive trench (*khandaq*) around their encampment (p. 106), evoking the "battle of the trench" so prominent in the biography of the Prophet. But the prophetology is always subsidiary to and supportive of the mahdiology.

3 *Vilāyat*

Prophetic and messianic authority also figure within the larger field of *vilāyat*, a complex and much used word expressing a range of qualities and processes. By *vilāyat*, I mean here those charismatic qualities accruing to the biography by virtue of the persona of Sayyid Muḥammad the Mahdī as the *khātam-i vilāyat* ("seal of messianic authority"), many of which are derived from Indian Sufi traditions, especially the Chishtiyya.¹⁷ The author of the *Sīrat* situates his biography solidly within two phases of Islamic spiritual history: that sealed by the Prophet and that sealed by the Mahdī (p. 5). This latter special domain of the Mahdī is attested by presence of the light of Muḥammadan messianic authority (*nūr al-vilāyat al-muḥammadiyya*, p. 7), which results in a certain narrative luminosity throughout the text. There are other bodily reminders of the equivalency between the Prophet and the Mahdī. In particular, the authority of the Mahdī is demonstrated by an actual messianic seal (*muhr al-vilāyat*), which is equivalent in shape and power to the prior prophetic seal (*muhr al-nabuwat*). This messianic seal is described in the *Sīrat* as a physical growth on the back of Sayyid Muḥammad, which was revealed only to select disciples as an indication of messianic grace (pp. 52–3, 80–1).¹⁸

17 The political implication to the millennial *vilāyat* is discussed in the next section. For a discussion of the larger field of Indo-Afghan *vilāyat* during this period, see Aquil, *Sufism*, especially chapter 5 ("The political and the Sufic wilayat"). For prophecy and saintship in the Indian Chishtī context, the standard account remains Hussaini, *Sayyid Muhammad al-Husayni-i Gisudiraz*, especially chapter 2.

18 Subsequent Mahdavi biographies insist on the physical quality of this seal to mark the messianism, drawings of this were provided at a later date. See Burhān al-Dīn, *Shavāhid*

Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān is particularly concerned with the process whereby messianic *vilāyat* came to inhabit Sayyid Muḥammad’s person and thus produced charisma that could be dispensed and used as a foundation for community coherence. This type of messianic power requires a good birth more than a good death,¹⁹ and thus the biography focuses attention on the birth, childhood, and early life of the future Mahdī.²⁰ Indeed, almost half of the biography (pp. 2–60) concerns the period prior to the formal proclamation of Mahdīship, and much of this occurs at Jawnpūr, a location that is rarely mentioned in earlier Mahdāvī disputational literature. This knowledge of Jawnpūr may be due in part to the above-mentioned connection of the author with Shāh Nizām of Jais and Shāh Dilāvar of Jawnpūr, both thought to have immigrated to Gujarat from North India.²¹ But the absence of pre-existing narratives of this early period provided ‘Abd al-Raḥmān with the leeway to construct an impressive explanatory narrative of the production of *vilāyat*. This is done in several ways.

The messianic power of Sayyid Muḥammad Jawnpūrī begins with his body, and the *Sīrat* insists on the profound purity of the infant from his birth. He is born free from blood and other viscous fluids, his cries are soothing rather than irritating, and he immediately covers his private parts (*sharmgāh*) with his hands, even when being changed by his mother (pp. 6, 8–9). The production of messianic charisma requires a powerful initiation within the context of the ‘ulamā’ and Sufis of Jawnpūr, and the *Sīrat* does this through the person of Shaykh Dāniyāl, who is known only in the Mahdāvī tradition. Shaykh Dāniyāl was a religious scholar who ran a local *madrasa* as well as serving as the primary *murshid* (Sufi guide) of the area. He was the first to recognize Sayyid Muḥammad’s messianic status as an infant (pp. 6–9), and then tutored and mentored him within the various Islamic sciences (pp. 15–20). It is important to the *Sīrat* that the future Mahdī achieves excellence while a child among

al-vilāyat 77–9 and Yūsuf, *Maṭla’* 30–2. The Urdu biography by Maḥmūdī provides an illustration of the seal (*al-Mahdī l-maw’ūd* 269).

- 19 The *Sīrat* has comparatively little interest in the death of the Mahdī (pp. 136–9); indeed, his death was followed by a dispute among his disciples about the place of his burial. Later Mahdāvī literature focused its mortuary concerns not on the Mahdī but on subsequent Mahdāvī *pir* lineages. For a list of the death dates of *pirs* for Mahdāvī devotional purposes, see Pālanpūrī, *Urs-nāma*.
- 20 The concern with millennial birth is also found in Abū l-Faḍl’s account of the Mughal emperor Akbar, a contemporary of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān. See Abū l-Faḍl, *Akbar-nāma* i, 52–7. For reflections on Akbar’s birth and sacred kingship, see Moin, *Millennial sovereign*, especially 137–8.
- 21 Unfortunately, narrative authority is rarely specified for this section of the *Sīrat*, and the connection of Shāh Nizām and Shāh Dilāvar to north India (or, indeed, to our author) is not always clear in the earliest sources.

both the externalizing *‘ulamā’* and the interiorizing Sufis. He memorizes the Qur’an at the age of seven and masters all *madrasa* subjects by twelve, receiving the title *Asad al-‘ulamā’* (“lion of the legal scholars”), while being visited periodically at school by paradigmatic Qur’anic prophets such as Elias, Enoch, and Jesus (pp. 19–20).

After graduation, Shaykh Dāniyāl leads Sayyid Muḥammad to a mosque in the jungle where he is introduced directly to Khvāja Khiḍr, the Qur’anic “green” man of so much importance to Sufi inspiration in India and elsewhere.²² Khiḍr teaches him a foundational *dhikr-i khāfi* (“secret remembrance [of God]” through the repetition of certain words and phrases) and then provisions him with a date still bearing the saliva of the Prophet (*khurmā bā lu‘āb*). Both the viscous date and the *dhikr* had been given to Khiḍr by the Prophet as a “trust” (*amānat*) to pass on to the Mahdī of the last days (pp. 20–2). The incident of the legacy of the Prophet provided through Khiḍr plays an important narrative role in the *Sīrat*, facilitating the passage beyond the Chishtī charisma represented by Shaykh Dāniyāl through a direct mystical conduit via Khiḍr to the Prophet, and thereby connects the two “seals.” The date passes on the transformative power of the Prophet to the Mahdī, connecting the prophetic and millennial cycles, and the *dhikr-i khāfi* becomes an enabling device in constructing the persona of the Mahdī as well as a defining quality of the charismatic community.

The biography concludes the formative phase with a series of *jihāds* followed by a lengthy ecstatic (*jadhbat*) period of asceticism and withdrawal into the jungle (pp. 27–33). After seven *jihāds*, in which the future Mahdī is said to have behaved with much bravery, he slays a Hindu *rāja* named Dilpat Rāy, striking him in half with a sword, and in the process revealing an image glowing inside the *rāja*’s body. Sayyid Muḥammad Jawnpūrī suddenly enters an ecstatic state that lasts for twelve years: he would take no food, and for the next five years only a little food. At the end of this period, he possessed the full powers of the *khātam-i vilāyat*, although this status would only gradually be revealed to his closest disciples as the narrative developed.

Thereafter, the *Sīrat* propels the biography by periodic displays of messianic charisma, most of which are expansions of phenomena commonplace within Indian Sufi biographical conventions.²³ These displays serve as instances of

22 For a discussion of the role of Khiḍr more generally, see Omar, *Khidr in the Islamic tradition*, 279–94. Armando Salvatore suggests that the narrative of Khiḍr sacralizes local space in a process of globalization. See Salvatore, *Notes on locality* 89–100. The same process is involved with Sayyid Muḥammad, although the sacralization concerns the persona of the Mahdī rather than space.

23 For these conventions, see Lawrence, *The Chishtiya* 47–67.

personal bonding of disciples, the public acknowledgment of messianic status, and narratives of social transformation. Images of messianic fragrance, saliva, secret displays of the *muhr-i vilāyat* and teachings of *dhikr-i khāfi*, and public demonstrations of esoteric Qur'anic meanings are the most prominent and lead to a sudden recognition of Sayyid Muḥammad Jawnpūrī as the Mahdī of the last days. Saliva (*tuf, lu'āb*) or morsels of masticated food (*pas khūrda*) feature prominently in these recognition tales, being linked to the formative prophetic saliva transferred to Sayyid Muḥammad by Khidr through the date as well as to Sufi charisma in the Indian tradition. This saliva sweetens brackish well water, permits the impregnation of the barren, and heals the sick (e.g., pp. 50–3, 129–30). The prophetic *dhikr-i khāfi* that had been entrusted to the Mahdī by Khidr is transferred secretly to selected disciples (e.g., p. 44) and increasingly came to define the spiritual hierarchy of the emerging messianic community.

Perhaps the most important of the biographical fruit of *vilāyat* is that of *bayān*, a term used for the Mahdī's authoritative commentary on the Qur'an. The *Sīrat* uses this term sparingly and with great care only after the final declaration of Mahdship at Barlī in Gujarat. The most extended example in the *Sīrat* is Sayyid Muḥammad's *bayān* of Qur'an 3:195 ("those who have emigrated or been driven out or suffered harm in My cause, and fought and been slain"), which is given in the city of Nāgōr in Rajasthan after his expulsion from Gujarat (pp. 98–100). This particular *bayān* enshrines the duty of emigration (*hijrat*)—which forms the grounds of communal space—and provides a biographical context for what will become a ritual. These authoritative interpretations of the Qur'an will subsequently be drawn on to provide devotional contexts for the ritual of the emerging residential communities (*dā'iras*) and constitute the cornerstone for the maintenance of a social Mahdavi identity.²⁴

4 *Siyāsāt*

The *Sīrat* is concerned throughout with the issue of the political authority of the Mahdī and the relationship of the movement to political elites and the state. Indeed, much of the biography focuses on the attraction of kings, nobles, and notables to the millennial dispensation of Sayyid Muḥammad Jawnpūrī, although often this conversion occurs in secret. The sultans of Jawnpūr, Māndū, Gujarat, Sindh, and Qandahār, for example, are all portrayed as readily accepting the Mahdship, the nobles and gentry of Ahmadabad, Pātan, and

24 For the later ritual of the *bayān*, see Singh, *Sainthood and revelatory discourse*.

Thatta as flocking to his presence, and the Mahdī himself as having no compunction with providing political advice (*naṣīḥat*) to political figures, notably Ḥusayn Sharqī and Ghiyāth al-Dīn (pp. 23–6, 44–7).²⁵ It is clear that our author wishes to position the movement among the elite and not the peasantry, and the text thus provides little support for those wishing to explain the origins of the movement as a rural peasant revolt.²⁶

At the same time, the *Sīrat* displays a complex attitude toward the institution of *jihād*, one of the normally understood functions of a Mahdī of the last days. The initial portion of the biography (pp. 23–8) refers at length to the seven battles of Sayyid Muḥammad against Hindu armies, which, as we have seen, is crucial in the narrative for the production of messianic power from the grounds of ecstasy. That is, the narrative requires a series of *jihāds* against non-Muslim political authorities, but at the same time it is the devotion of the Hindu Rāja Dilpat Rāy to the engraved internal image mentioned previously that leads to the final enabling production of messianic *vilāyat* within the person of the future Mahdī. This section of the biography is peppered with Qurʾanic quotations, which is usually a sign of the serious nature of the text within a background of disputation.

More prominently, the biography clearly intends to demonstrate that the *jihād* of the mature Sayyid Muḥammad had become a spiritual quest, with implications for the subsequent political community. During the prolonged negotiations at Thatta with the king, Jām Nānda, the Mahdī informed his followers that if God permitted, he would levy the *jizya* (poll tax on non-Muslims) on the Muslims of Thatta, and then waved his sword in the air (p. 109). This is an extraordinarily aggressive attitude toward members of the *umma*, but the *Sīrat* then cautiously notes that Sayyid Muḥammad explained to his followers that this *jihād* against other Muslims was not his mission.

The politically quietist attitude becomes even more prominent as the biography leads Sayyid Muḥammad into Afghan and Arghūn territory (in present-day Afghanistan). In the city of Qandahār, for example, the robust Mīr Dhū l-Nūn Arghūn (d. 913/1507) abruptly asked Sayyid Muḥammad about the *ḥadīth* that suggests that the Mahdī of the last days could not be cut by sword, drowned by water, or burned by fire (pp. 126–8). The *Sīrat* glosses over the physical quality of the description, suggesting that the sword is allegorical and simply means that no one could be victorious spiritually over the Mahdī. The Mīr, after trying

25 For the political dynamics of this complex period of north Indian history, see Kumar, *Bandagī* and *naukarī* 60–7.

26 See MacLean, *Sociology* 150–68, for a more complete discussion of the movement's complex sociology and its relationship to changing political circumstances.

and failing to strike Sayyid Muḥammad Jawnpūrī, is said to have accepted his Mahdship and offered military support for the movement, which the Mahdī rejected, telling him to “strike the sword against your own lower self” (p. 128). Indeed, much of the later section consists of tales of the spiritual conversion of Arghūn and Tīmūrid elites of Khurāsān, conversions that are interpreted as proof of the status of the spiritual (not political) Mahdship of Sayyid Muḥammad Jawnpūrī.

This muted biographical attitude toward *jihād* and the confrontation with the state, it should be noted, is an important departure from some earlier accounts, especially those that focus on Sayyid Khūndmīr, the prominent companion and second *khalīfa* (“successor”) to the Mahdī. Khūndmīr was martyred in 930/1523 in what Mahdavis have termed the affair of “they fought and were slain.”²⁷ For the *Sīrat*, the tale of Sayyid Muḥammad Jawnpūrī as Mahdī is clearly one of spiritual and not political triumph.

5 *Ziyārat / Ḥajj / Hīrat*

Spatial movement features prominently in the organization of the *Sīrat*, which employs three primary movements, each associated with a stage in the narrative of the progressive realization of the Mahdship of Sayyid Muḥammad Jawnpūrī. These are, in chronological order, the *ziyārat* (saintly pilgrimage), *ḥajj* (Islamic ritual pilgrimage to Mecca), and *hīrat* (messianic emigration). Each of the three stages requires the performance of foundational miracles of a specific type, and each serves to organize and propel the narrative. The first two stages prepare the way for the final stage, which then can claim the prior spatial orientations and their qualities for the culminating messianic movement that ends the biography and points to the future. Without this final movement, following on and absorbing the prior movements, there would be no possibility of a community, a history, and a future. This threefold process of transformation attaches millennial historicity to the chronology of Sayyid Muḥammad and makes the Mahdaviyya community that emerges logical, desirable, and inevitable.

²⁷ The *Sīrat* refers to Sayyid Khūndmīr in terms of “they fought and were slain” (p. 140), but otherwise does not emphasize this prominent companion and his activist political perspective. There is another biographical lineage featuring the tradition of Sayyid Khūndmīr and tropes of martyrdom. See, for example, the *Chhand sharīf* attributed to Faqīr ‘Alī Muḥammad and written in Braj Bhasha around 940/1533. See MacLean, *Sociology*, for discussion.

The first stage, *ziyārat*, follows naturally on the exit of Sayyid Muḥammad from the twelve years of ascetic and ecstatic meditation in the jungle near Jawnpūr. At this point still prior to the declaration of Mahdship, he begins to initiate disciples at Jawnpūr (fourteen are named, p. 33), and then leaves the city on a triumphal traversal of the major political and religious sites of the pre-Mughal period (pp. 33–60): Chandērī, Chāmpānīr, Māndū, Burhānpūr, Dawlatābād, Aḥmadnagar, Bīdar, and Gulbargā.²⁸ The *ziyārat* stage requires a miraculous encounter followed by a sudden recognition of the *vilāyat* of Sayyid Muḥammad by the spiritual leaders of Sufi shrines: thus, among other things, sour wells are rendered sweet, the physical mole on the back of the Mahdī transforms consciousness, and saliva and chewed food becomes curative. While there is some competitive dueling with established Sufis, notably at Chandērī,²⁹ in general, this stage requires the recognition of *vilāyat* with existing mystical traditions and lineages through an ecstatic experience (*jadhba*). Sainly pilgrimage shades into Meccan pilgrimage in a most unusual anecdote (pp. 56–8) associated with a vision of Sayyid Muḥammad Gīsū Darāz (d. 825/1422), the celebrated Chishtī Sufi of Gulbargā in the Deccan. While proceeding from Bīdar to Mecca, the spirit of Gīsū Darāz appeared to the future Mahdī, apologized for his own earlier error in previously claiming the Mahdship, and invited him to visit his tomb at Gulbargā. This culminating incident at the most prominent Indian Sufi shrine of the time suggests that the natural spiritual genealogy of the Mahdship is within the Indian Sufi order from which it emerged and which it will not replace.

The second stage of the ritual pilgrimage to Mecca (pp. 59–65) immediately follows from the mystical tour of the Deccan, beginning at the port of Dabhōl. This section, perhaps surprisingly, is somewhat sparse, focusing more on miracles of liminal maritime travel than on the actual rituals of the pilgrimage in the Hijaz. Thus, the narrative has much calming of storms, miraculous provisioning, and the appearance of the fish that had swallowed Jonah, preserved by God all these years in order to sight the “seal of sainthood” (p. 60). While the narrative requires a Meccan phase for the production of messianic charisma, the actual declaration of Mahdship in Mecca is anticlimactic, occurring immediately after landing and being attested to by three companions (p. 61).

28 The prominence of the Deccan suggests that the author was associated with the Mahdavi move southward from Gujarat into the Deccan.

29 See *Sīrat* 39–41, which refers to leaders (*mashā'ikhān*) from the eighteen hereditary Sufi families of the city of Chandērī expelling Sayyid Muḥammad Jawnpūrī and his disciples (not yet Mahdavis) from the city; they were then punished by being incinerated in their homes after a drunken brawl. This is clearly a criticism of the system of hereditary Sufi leaders in India.

Shortly thereafter, Sayyid Muḥammad is told by the spirit of the Prophet to head directly to Gujarat and realize his Mahdship there and not Mecca. This is one of a number of Islamizing but de-Arabizing motifs that shift messianic power from the Arab Middle East and the gatekeepers of the Hijaz back to India. The Prophet compels this and the Mahdī enables it.

The final stage is entered on the return of Sayyid Muḥammad to Gujarat, his confirmatory declaration of Mahdship at Barlī, and the emigration of the majority of his companions to Sindh and then Khurasan. At this stage, the Mahdī utilizes his fully developed messianic authority to reinstate the obligation of *hijrat* (“emigration”), which the majority of Muslim jurists considered abrogated after the era of the Prophet. While this *hijrat* is related to the earlier prophetic *hijrat* from Mecca to Medina, it has now become messianic, which requires believers in the Mahdship to leave behind their homeland and family and join their companions in a physical and social emigration. The *Sīrat* places the original command to emigrate in the context of an emigration to Sindh, and clearly preserves an early expectation that Thatta (like Medina for the Prophet) will become the *dār al-hijra* (“place of refuge”) of the Mahdavis, with the support of Jām Nānda, Qāḍī Qādan, Daryā Khān, Shaykh Ṣadr al-Dīn Tattavī, and other prominent nobles, scholars, and mystics in the Sindh. The messianic *hijrat* requires a difficult passage and a test of resolve; the section is filled with descriptions of privations in landscapes that become increasingly fearsome as the Afghan frontier is traversed. As the narrative progresses, *hijrat* becomes the clearest marker of the messianic community, and indeed, there is no possibility of salvation without making the messianic emigration to the *dā’ira* (“circle”) of the Mahdaviyya, which increasingly becomes the focus of the narrative.

This movement through three stages allows for continuity of the unique Mahdavi dispensation with the pan-Indian and pan-Islamic spatial traditions. Just as the *khātām-i vilāyat* succeeds the *khātām-i nabūvat*, so the final *hijrat-i vilāyat* succeeds the *ziyārat* and *hajj* from which it emerges. The vivid descriptions of the traversal of space and the clustering of believers within *dā’iras* reinforce the notion of a small but righteous community prevailing against all odds in the pursuit of salvation. In the *Sīrat*, the *hijrat* of Sayyid Muḥammad Jawnpūrī and his disciples notably ends by merging into an abbreviated account of the five successors (*khulafā’*) to the messianic leadership.³⁰ The

30 They are, in order, Mirān Sayyid Maḥmūd (the son of the Mahdī), Bandagī Miyān Sayyid Khūndmīr, Bandagī Miyān Ni’mat, Bandagī Miyān Nizām, and Bandagī Miyān Shāh Dilāvar. Unlike later Mahdavi biographies, the *Sīrat* only provides their names, without biographical details.

community of the Mahdavis founded on the Mahdī becomes both its past and future.

6 Conclusions

It is now possible to offer some conclusions about the nature and context of the *Sīrat* and its subsequent influence. In this chapter, I have confronted a simple question: what happens when a Mahdī has appeared and died, and it becomes necessary to write a biography? The very writing of the biography of an individual commonly thought to usher in an immediate chain of events at the end of time is filled with challenges and complexities. Moreover, in the absence of a textual precedent in South Asia, where there have been many Sufis and notables, but few, if any, Mahdīs, it was possible to create a genre without a specific precedence. The instance of the *Sīrat* offers us an unusual glimpse into the emergence of a new form of knowledge, but at the same time suggests processes and disputations related to the enabling of devotion, authority, and community.

At first glance, the *Sīrat* seems fragmented and patched together in a kind of bricolage forged willy-nilly from prior Mahdavi texts and non-Mahdavi genres.³¹ But there is more to the *Sīrat* than patchwork, and the millennial and liminal qualities of the biography seem to permit a type of interstitial historiography that not only mines existing genres, but also inhabits spaces between genres in order to plot salvation within a social context. It is clear though that Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān is selective in what he appropriates and imaginative in how the elements are combined and balanced within the framework of his biography. The process of selection contains repressions as well as additions.

The three major repressions—i.e., that which is not patched into the biography—are quite bold and unexpected from the prior Mahdavi literature. First, Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān retains the millennialism of the initial phase, but silences its apocalyptic quality, especially notions and descriptions of dates and details.³² Second, he shifts the more material understanding of *jihād* from the political to the spiritual, making it either iconic (as in the *jihād* against Dilpat Rāy) or metaphorical for a superior stage of messianic *vilāyat* (as in the case of the Arghūns). There is little enthusiasm in the *Sīrat* for a biography that

31 By bricolage, I mean the local production of a narrative through the assembly of elements from pre-existing but not necessarily coherent narratives. For a discussion of bricolage in a South Asian context, see Bouillier, Un ‘bricolage’ hagiographique 128–38.

32 Compare the *Sīrat* with the previously cited Khūndmīr, *Maktūb-i Multānī*.

foreshadows the clash against the state in the tradition of “they fought and were slain.” Third, he mutes the Arabic voice and the local Indian vernacular tradition,³³ and in the process radically Islamizes the Indian location of his history within a Persianate context.³⁴ The critical salvation history of the millennium takes place within a Persianate India, needing no justification from the Arab *‘ulamā’* of the Hijaz or their Indian representatives.³⁵ The messianic style of the biography settles comfortably among existing Indian devotional styles in Persian, especially that of the production and dispersal of saintly charisma.

Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān also enables specifically Mahdavi forms of devotion and community, while seeing them as naturally emerging from and completing pre-existing forms. This is done by providing support from discrete genres for uniquely Mahdavi ways of conceptualizing and ritualizing Islam: the continual silent liturgy, the vision of God, renunciation of the world and reliance on God, seeking of companionship of the ascetics, controlling the practice of earning wages (*kasb*), and the like.³⁶ Many of these worldviews, rituals, and institutions (e.g., *dhikr* and *kasb*) were familiar piecemeal among Indian Muslims, but here they take on a new millennial imaginary within a community. More importantly, the *Sīrat* facilitates the organization of the community into *dā’iras* (residential communities) by elevating the theme of *hijrat* (“emigration”) while at the same time delinking it from *jihād*.³⁷ The millennial poetics holding together the assembly of genres leads the narrative naturally into a community of salvation that both completes and opens up history.

These historiographic repressions and constructions are not simply the continuation of pre-existing tendencies among the Mahdaviyya: some of the earliest Mahdavi literature does have apocalyptic qualities, emphasizes a more political *jihād*, and selects the vernacular or Arabic to telling effect. Thus, for

33 For example, in the absence of popular Indian meters such as the *dohā* and *chaupāī*. For the larger body of Indo-Muslim literature written in the vernacular at this time, see Behl, *Love’s subtle magic*, especially chapter 9: “Hierarchies of response.”

34 The *Sīrat* is solidly Persianate in culture and class. For the Indo-Persian context, see Alam, *Languages of political islam*, especially chapter 4: “Language and power.” However, there is not one single Indian Persianate tradition, and the author of the *Sīrat* writes in a vernacular Persian with few of the lexical complexities of Mughal court Persian. This could lead to misunderstandings, as in the case of imperial conventions of debate at the court of Akbar. See MacLean, *Real men* 199–215.

35 Unlike the literature of the larger Indian Ocean area, the perspectives of the *Sīrat* are not part of a larger Arabic cosmopolis. For a bold rethinking of Arabization and Islamization, see Ricci, *Islam translated*.

36 The Mahdavi way of living in the world is best found in an encyclopedic work written in 1062/1651 by Burhān al-Dīn, *Ḥadiqat al-ḥaqā’iq*.

37 For the rules of the Mahdavi hospices, see Pālanpūrī, *Ḥudūd-i dā’irah*.

example, Qāḍī Qādan, a first generation convert to the Mahdī, was the first major writer in the Sindhi language, vernacular quotations are commonplace in early sources, and there are numerous early Mahdāvī works in western Hindi and Urdu.³⁸ And certain early Mahdavis wrote entirely in Arabic, especially within the genre of disputation.³⁹

Why does Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān construct his biography in this manner? I will suggest two reasons: one relates to the formation of community and the other to the political realities of the mid-tenth/sixteenth century.

The first and most obvious explanation relates to the reconstruction of biography as a consequence of the passage of time and what one might expect from the sociology of millennialism.⁴⁰ Moreover, as Cathy Gutierrez observes, millennial movements can only survive the narrative expectations of the closure of their own epistemic project by moving from millennial “fact” to historical “interpretation.”⁴¹ In the case of the Mahdaviyya, as the apocalyptic moment receded, the Mahdī’s charisma was increasingly routinized within the Mahdāvī communes with their religious specialists descended from the first generation of converts forming a lineage of pirs. The messianic foundations of this subsequent authority are then projected back on the Mahdī, and require reification within and across a plurality of pre-existing genres. The *Sīrat* envisions a movement away from disputation for the purposes of conversion, as in the first generation of Mahdāvī literature, to the construction of a devotional biography for the purpose of community formation and support. At the same time, the *Sīrat* is intended to resonate within a high Persianate tradition of Afghan and Indian Islam, being appropriated within the gentry classes of Gujarat and the Deccan, although not always successfully.

The more material explanation would situate the *Sīrat* within its socio-political context. Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān is writing his biography at a key moment in Mahdāvī and Indo-Muslim history. This is the affair of Shaykh ‘Alā’ī (d. 957/1556), which features so prominently in Mughal and Afghan historiography. Shaykh ‘Alā’ī, a prominent Mahdāvī of north India, gained the support of large numbers of Niyāzī Afghans in the north Indian town of Bayāna, not distant from the city of Agra, and then challenged the Islamic legitimacy of

38 For a discussion of the Urdu literature of the Mahdavis, see Yadillāhī, *Urdū adab*. For a critical edition by H.J. Takhur of the Sindhi poetry of Qāḍī Qādan, see *Qāḍī Qādan jō kalāmu*.

39 See, for example, ‘Abd al-Malik Sajāvandī, *Sirāj al-abṣār*, which was written in Arabic in 960/1552 as a detailed refutation of the attack on the Mahdaviyya by the Chishtī scholar and mystic ‘Alī l-Muttaqī l-Hindī (d. 975/1567), a resident of Mecca.

40 See Talmon, Millenarian movements 159–200.

41 Gutierrez, The millennium 47–59.

the Sūrī state on the grounds of injustice.⁴² He subsequently would be charged with heresy and executed, bringing to an end the last major Mahdavi political revolt, which followed a chain of earlier incidents, especially that of Sayyid Khūndmīr. The Afghan commune at Bayāna would be reabsorbed within the Chishtī context and the distinct Mahdavi identity disappear.

It seems reasonable to conclude that Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān belonged to that group of Mahdavis who were opposed to this Bayāna gambit of Mahdizing the state through an Afghan *jihād*. If so, then the biographical contours of the *Sīrat* become clearer: the rejection of *jihād* and apocalypse, the mystification of conflict, the emphasis on the early Jawnpūr narrative, the choice of pan-Indian Persian over vernacular or Arabic (Shaykh ‘Alā’ī wrote only in Arabic), and the concern with textual continuities with existing genres. Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān is taking a position in the argument over the nature, social location, and political legacy of the Mahdaviyya movement in India.

The dispute over its direction will intensify in the decades after the writing of the *Sīrat*, as the venerable Shaykh Mubārak Nāgōrī considers interiorizing Mahdism as a solution to being spiritual in India and the Mughal emperor Akbar (d. 1014/1605) toys with coopting a non-Afghan Mahdavi messianic charisma as a foundation for a new type of state.⁴³ But in the long run, Shāh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān succeeded in creating in his *Sīrat* a type of devotional literature that had not existed before, namely, the biography of a Mahdī within multiple historical contexts. It is his version of millennial history that will prevail in the subsequent Mahdavi historiography of Sayyid Muḥammad Jawnpūrī, forming the template for the rapidly proliferating (and increasingly long and substantial) biographies down to the present. In these subsequent renditions, the imagined biography of the Mahdī will be integrated within a larger *tadhkīrat* tradition of multiple biographies of the evolving class of *pīrs*, linking the messianic charisma of specialist lineages to the Mahdī. For the most part, these later biographies will maintain the shift of the *Sīrat* from messianic to millennial biography, softening and mystifying the foundational persona, and shifting to larger issues of devotion and routinized social justice for the Mahdavis in the real world of Gujarat and the Deccan. In this millennial historical imaginary, the Mahdī becomes a transcendent figure enabling other-worldly salvation directed by *pīrs* within Mahdavi communes as well as legitimizing this-worldly

42 See MacLean, ‘Alā’ī 60 for sources and commentary.

43 For details of this Mughal phase, see MacLean, *Real men*. In particular, note the Mahdavi replies to questions of Shaykh Mubārak (the father of Abū l-Faḍl, the architect of Akbar’s theory of state) by Shaykh Muṣṭafā Gujarātī, *Risālat al-ḥujjat al-bāligha* and by ‘Abd al-Malik Sajāvandī, *Minhāj al-taqwīm*.

participation of Mahdavis within the larger political and moral economy of Persianate South Asia.

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From a Persian Barbarian to a Superior Sage to Chinese Sages: the Image of the Prophet in Ma Zhu's *Shengzan*

Hyondo Park

The Prophet Muḥammad, says Anne-Marie Schimmel, “defines the borders of Islam as a religion,”^{1,2} as in the second part of the *shahāda*, “Muḥammad is the messenger of God.” By this, Islam distinguishes itself from other monotheistic religious traditions like Judaism and Christianity. The significance of Muḥammad in Muslim religious life cannot be emphasized enough. Muslim adoration and reverence for Muḥammad was so phenomenal in the eyes of scholars like Gibb, that he titled his introductory book to Islam “Mohammedanism,”³ though this was often criticized as a misnomer. As Smith observed in twentieth-century India, “Muslims will allow attacks on Allah: there are atheists and atheistic publications, and rationalistic societies; but to disparage Muhammad will provoke from even the most ‘liberal’ sections of the community a fanaticism of blazing vehemence.”⁴ As the highest human ideal by which to fashion Muslim lives and conduct, Muḥammad is internalized in the hearts of Muslims like a jewel.⁵ Indeed, he is “dead only in the least significant sense. For he is ideologically alive—and well.”⁶

Although living as a minority far from the central Islamic world, Muslims in China are no exception to the phenomenon of adoring Muḥammad, for “the history of Muslims in China is not a history isolated from other Muslims.”⁷ They too inherited the tradition of venerating the Prophet and they too

1 This paper is based on my dissertation at the University of Tehran (Chinese Muslim Images, 2014). Although I wrote most of it under the supervision of Professor Little, unfortunately I could not complete it at McGill. Yet he continued to encourage me until I finally finished it. Were it not for him, I could not have pursued my scholarly career as an Islamicist. Thank you my shaykh! In memoriam aeternam.

2 Schimmel, *And Muhammad* 3.

3 Gibb, *Mohammedanism*.

4 Smith, *Modern Islam* 72.

5 Asani and Abdel-Malek describe Muḥammad as being internalized into every Muslim's heart. See Asani and Abdel-Malek, *Celebrating Muḥammad* 22.

6 Akhtar, *Be careful* 28; quoted in Bennett, *In search of Muhammad* 1.

7 Fletcher, *Studies* 3.

internalized their love for him. However, they externalized their pious feelings for their Prophet by using their own distinctive indigenous local elements, often unheard of and even alien to traditional Islamic thought in the realm of Islam (*dār al-Islām*).

As in the Indo-Muslim tradition, Chinese Muslims expressed the same *sensus religiosus* for their adoration of the Prophet according to their own distinct local tradition, that is, Confucianism. In scope and nature, however, Chinese Muslim works differ from Indo-Muslim literature, for Chinese Muslim intellectuals living in an entirely non-Islamic milieu faced a distinctive historical and cultural situation. Theirs is “the first instance in which Muslims wrote major treatises in the language of one of the great, pre-existing intellectual traditions.”⁸ The externalization of their religious feelings for the Prophet was conditioned by the Chinese language, which is imbued with the culture of the Middle Kingdom: there are indigenous elements that would “certainly appear strange,” and often incomprehensible without knowledge of religious-philosophical traditions of the land, “if they could be translated directly back into Persian or Arabic.”⁹

Here, I refer to *Shengzan* (In praise of the Sage), by Ma Zhu (1640–1711?); this is the earliest rhymed prose panegyric for Muḥammad in Chinese Muslim literature, often called the *Han Kitāb*. Written around 1690, the roughly 5,800-character text embellishes the virtues of the Prophet with miraculous elements, by quoting from the Chinese classics; it constitutes a part of the seventh book of his multi-volume work on Islam, *Qingzhen zhinan* (Compass of the pure and real). It is composed of fifty-eight main sections (eight hundred forty-five characters), fifty-four of which are immediately followed by Ma's own roughly five-thousand-character explanatory commentary. The work epitomizes the earliest attempt to introduce the Prophet to both Muslim and non-Muslim Chinese audiences by means of the intellectual and cultural traditions of the land they lived in. The work served to deepen the love of the Prophet in the hearts of Ma's fellow Chinese Muslims who could not read or write traditional Muslim languages like Arabic or Persian. At the same time, the Chinese texts introduced the Islamic Prophet to non-Muslim Chinese.

Introducing the work, hitherto unknown except in Chinese, in this paper I discuss how the Chinese scholar (*ʿālim*) Ma Zhu extols the superiority of the Prophet by utilizing traditional Islamic narratives interspersed and often tinged with elements from historical, cultural, and intellectual Chinese milieus. In so doing, I endeavor to identify common traditional Muslim narrative elements

8 Murata, *Chinese* 5.

9 Ibid. 3.

on the Prophet, as well as indigenous Chinese views, and to show that although the Chinese scholars (*‘ulamā’*) envisaged ideal images of Muḥammad by creatively utilizing Islamic traditions in the Chinese historical, cultural, and intellectual milieu, they continually presented Muḥammad as more than a true achiever of the neo-Confucian ideal of the perfect human being, an ideal that even Confucius confessed not to have reached yet.

1 Chinese References to Muḥammad

Chinese chronicles indicate that the first governmental contact between Islamic and Chinese civilizations took place in 651:

In the second year of Yong’hui [the name of the first era of Emperor Gaozong of the Tang Dynasty, 650–6], [the king of Dashi] started to send his envoys to the court of the Tang dynasty. The family name of the king is Dashi, and his name is Danmimomoni. [The envoy] informed [them] that the Dashi dynasty had been ruled by three kings for thirty-four years.¹⁰

Here Dashi refers to Arabia. Apparently, the king of Dashi refers to the third caliph ‘Uthmān.

In the eighth century, two significant events took place between the two civilizations: the battle of Ṭalās in 751 and the rebellion of An Lushan in 755. In an attempt to extend its sphere of influence in Central Asia, the Chinese Tang dynasty sent General Kao Xianzhi (Kor. Go Seonji) of Korean descent to Farghāna in Central Asia. Kao was successful in re-establishing Chinese authority there, but his mismanagement of local affairs in Tashkent provoked a military conflict with Muslim armies dispatched by Abū Muslim al-Khurāsānī (ca. 100–34/718–54). The two forces met at the Ṭalās River in 751 and the Muslims won the battle. This conflict is politically important, as it “determined the question [of] which of the two civilizations, the Chinese or the Muslim, should predominate in the land,” that is, Central Asia.¹¹ The cultural influence of the Chinese is notable: the Muslim world learned the technique of paper making from Chinese war prisoners.

10 *Ershiwushi* xxiv (*Jiutangshu*) juan 198, liezhuan 148, Xirongu, Dashiguo; *Ershiwushi* xxvii (*Xintangshu*), juan 221 xia, liezhuan 146 xia, Xiyu xia.

11 Barthold, *Turkestan* 196.

In 755, just four years later, China faced the rebellion of General An Lushan, an officer of Turkish descent who lost royal favor in his power struggle at court and eventually led a revolt of 200,000 soldiers in Fanyang (near modern Beijing) and occupied the capital city of Chang'an (modern Xi'an). Upon request for help from the Tang emperor, the 'Abbāsid caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 754–775) dispatched an embassy and auxiliary troops. The Muslim forces fought along with the Uighur and other western troops to help the Chinese successfully quell the rebellion that lasted until 763. It is said that the foreign troops stayed in the Tang's capital city of Chang'an and this led to the formation of a historically significant Muslim community in China.¹²

Although the Chinese knew Islam from the seventh century, their knowledge of the Prophet Muḥammad (whose name in Chinese sources was variously transliterated as Mo, Mohanmode, Mahanbade, Macimo, Maxiawu, and Mahama, etc.) was so meager that he was not even mentioned in the *Jingxingji* (Record of travel) of Du Huan (fl. mid-eighth century),¹³ the earliest Chinese travel account of Islamic Arabia in the early eighth century. At the battle of Ṭalās fought between the 'Abbāsids and the Tang dynasty in 751, Du was taken as a war prisoner; he returned home in 762. His book is lost, but his uncle Du You's (735–812) *Tongdian* preserves some parts of the work. In the eyes of early Chinese writers like Du You, Muḥammad was not a man of religion, but a military leader who became king by taking up arms against Persia.

In the reign of Yong'hui, Arabia paid tribute to the Tang dynasty by sending envoys. It is said that the country is to the west of Persia. Or it is said that a Persian barbarian who was divinely aided acquired a sword, killed people, and called [summoned] all the barbarians to the neighborhood. Eleven barbarians came to enthrone Mo as king.¹⁴

Du's contemporary Mai Dan (730–805), a minister and scholar of geography, records a similar statement.

In the reign of Kaihuang [the name of the first era of Emperor Wen of the Sui Dynasty, 581–600] in the Sui dynasty, the Gulie [Quraysh?] tribe was the leader among the Arabs. The Gulie had two family groups: Penni Xishen [Banī Hāshim] and Panni Mohuan [Banī Marwān]. The Xishen

12 Chang, *The development* 36. Leslie argues that this cannot be the origin of the large numbers of Muslims in Kansu, as Chinese Muslims traditionally claim. See Leslie, *Islam*, 54.

13 Xiong, *Historical* 148.

14 Du, *Tongdian*, juan 193.

[Hāshim] had Mohemo [Muḥammad]. He was brave and wise. People crowned him as king.¹⁵

Jiutangshu (The old chronicle of the Tang dynasty), compiled from 940 to 945, provides an interesting story that mentions Muḥammad's revelatory experience. Here, he is described as a leader of a rebellion against Persia:

Arabia was originally in the west of Persia. In the reign of Daye [the name of the era of Emperor Ming of the Sui Dynasty, 605–18], there was a Persian barbarian camel shepherd in the mountains of Modina [Medina]. Suddenly a lion man appeared and said to him: "In the west of this mountain lie three caves where there are many weapons. You can get them. There are, in the caves, also writings in white on a black stone. If you read them, you can be a king." Following what was said to him, the barbarian went to see the caves and found the stone and many weapons. The writings told him to "revolt." So he rebelled and mustered forces, and crossed the Henghe River. They attacked caravans. His followers grew and took the western territories of Persia and he declared himself a king. Persia and Byzantium tried to subjugate him by force but they were all defeated.¹⁶

A similar anecdote is recorded a century later in *Xintangshu* (The new chronicle of the Tang dynasty), compiled between 1032 and 1060.

In the reign of Daye of the Sui dynasty, there was a Persian barbarian camel shepherd in the mountain of Modina [Medina]. A beast appeared and said to him: "In the west of this mountain lie three caves where there are weapons and a black stone on which words are written in white. Anyone who gets it will become a king." He ran to the place and, as was told, found the writing on the stone that says "revolt." So he deceived the people, crossed the Henghe River, and attacked caravans. The Baoxi [Persian?] shepherd became a king and moved and preserved the black stone. People came to subjugate him but they were all defeated.¹⁷

Although the source does not name the Persian barbarian, Muḥammad is certainly the man referred to here. It is not known from where the Chinese

15 Mai Dan (730–805), *Gujin Junquo Daoxuan Siyishu* quoted in Wang Fu (922–82), *Tang'huizao*, juan 100, Dashiguo.

16 *Ershiwushi* xxiv (*Jiutangshu*), juan 198, liezhuan 148, Xirongu, Dashiguo.

17 *Ershiwushi* xxvii (*Xintangshu*), juan 221 xia, liezhuan 146 xia, Xiyu xia.

historians obtained the story which seems to be an anachronistic Chinese version of a Muslim *ḥadīth* about Muḥammad's prophetic call and his reception of the Quranic revelation in the cave of Ḥirā' through the angelic agency of Gabriel.¹⁸ In the Chinese story, the Quran seems to have been depicted as "white writings on a black stone," Gabriel as "a lion man," and the cave of Ḥirā' as "a cave on the western side of the mountains in Medina" (not Mecca).

Trade relations, especially by sea, between the Islamic and Chinese civilizations facilitated the growth of the Muslim population in China's southeast coastal provinces during the Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) dynasties. We have two conspicuous reports to this effect. First, according to *Xintangshu*, in 760, several thousand Arab and Persian merchants were put to death in a local insurrection in Yangzhou (in Jiangsu province of eastern China); this indicates that there was a settlement of Muslims in the present Guangdong province.¹⁹ Second, Arab sources say that in 878, rebels led by Huang Chao (d. 884), the leader of a peasant rebellion during the late Tang dynasty, captured Guangzhou and killed about 120,000 to 200,000 Muslims, Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians living as merchants, because they were too rich. This number was likely inflated, but it shows that a significant number of Muslims had settled there, probably after engaging in maritime trade activities in the China's southeastern seaport.²⁰

Indeed, Muslim sea trade prospered in China as a result of the Chinese government's lenient policy, to such an extent that Muslims were free to practice their own religion and sacred law. Although temporarily shrunk after the disastrous massacre by the Huang Chao rebellion (874–84), Muslim maritime trade revived in the Song dynasty (960–1279). The southeastern seaports like Guangzhou, Quanzhou, and Fuzhou attracted Muslim merchants. As trade increased under the supervision of the government's maritime inspection office, Muslims chose to build mosques and settle permanently in China. By the end of the Song dynasty, they "had become a common part of the economic and social world in Chinese cities that were connected to international trade.... [they] found China to be a good place to do business and to set up households."²¹ By intermarrying with Chinese women and teaching their children to speak local dialects of Chinese, they laid the foundation for permanent Sino-Muslim communities all over China.²²

18 Ibn Ishāq conveys the earliest record of the event in his *sīra*; see Guillaume, *The life* 104–7.

19 In 760, suppressing rebellion, the troops of Tian Shen Gong pillaged Yangzhou and opened up graves; several thousand Arab and Persian merchants were killed. See Leslie, *Islam* 36; Chang, *The development* 29.

20 Chang, *The development* 39.

21 Lipman, *Familiar strangers* 30, 31.

22 Ibid.

The Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), set up by the Mongols in China, entirely changed Chinese society at its roots. The Mongol invasion of China brought the Chinese into closer contact with the Muslim world than ever before. The Mongols established a caste society composed of four classes: (1) the ruling Mongols; (2) the people with ‘colored eyes’ (Semuren, that is, Central Asian Muslims), so called because of the way their physical features differed from that of the Mongols; (3) the northern Chinese (Hanren); and (4) the southern Chinese (Nanzi) who had resisted the Mongol invasion longer than the northern Chinese had. The Mongols employed Central and West Asian Muslims to rule their Chinese subjects. As part of people with ‘colored eyes’ (a second class to the Mongols), Muslims held various important government positions, including ministerial office, and “monopolized or dominated some academic and economic fields within the Yuan bureaucracy.”²³ Before the Mongol domination, Muslims were confined to the Silk Road towns and southeast coastal cities as merchants; later, as government officials, Muslims began to enrich the Chinese civilization by introducing advanced Muslim science and culture. For example, the Muslim calendar was applied to agricultural production in China, and Muslims occupied the bureau of astronomy until they were replaced by Jesuits during the late Ming dynasty (1368–1644). Even after the Mongols dispersed from China, the Chinese Ming court not only allowed Muslims to practice Islam, but it also continued to employ them “in high office, including a large number of scientists in the government agencies responsible for astrology, the calendar, and the interpretation of omens.”²⁴

As the Muslim population grew considerably under the patronage of the Mongols in the Yuan dynasty, the image of Muḥammad in China gained in clarity, as we know from epigraphic evidence in mosques.

Modina [Medina] is the motherland of Muslims. In the beginning, the king Mohanmode [Muḥammad] was born with a divine spirit and had great virtue. He subjugated all the countries of the western frontier and was honorably called Bie'anba'er [*payghambar*],²⁵ which [means] ‘heavenly messenger’ in Chinese.²⁶

23 Ibid. 33.

24 Ibid. 39.

25 The Persian *payghambar* was rendered into Chinese as heavenly messenger (*tianshi*), master (*shi*), and sage (*sheng*, *shenren*). During the Qing dynasty (1644–1912), *payghambar* was translated into the Chinese word *qinchai* which means a high commissioner sent by the emperor for a special task. This clearly shows that Islam in China was under the sphere of Persian influences; see Kōdō, *Chugoku ni* 1250.

26 Inscription in Libai Mosque in Dingzhou (dated 1348) Yu and Lei, *Zhongguo* 14–16.

In the beginning, the king of Modena [Medina], Bie'anba'er Mohanmode [*payghambar* Muḥammad], was born with divine spirit and had great virtue. He subjugated all the countries of the western frontier. Everyone called him the sage. Bie'anba'er is like the heavenly messenger in Chinese. People referred to him as such in reverence.²⁷

This is our great sage of the western heaven, Piyanba'er Mahema [*payghambar* Muḥammad].²⁸

As Muslims collaborated with the ruling Mongols, Chinese antipathy against Muslims deepened. After the Yuan dynasty fell to the Chinese Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Muslims were restrained by the Chinese government. By law, Muslims were required to marry non-Muslim Chinese; marriage between Muslims was only allowed when non-Muslim Chinese refused to marry Muslims.²⁹

Notable exceptions were the first emperor Hongwu (the name of the first era of Taizu, r. 1368–99) and the third Yongle, the fourth son of Hongwu. In 1368, Hongwu wrote *Zhisheng bazizan* (A panegyric of one hundred characters, dedicated to Muḥammad). It is inscribed in the Nanjing mosque, though not recorded in the official chronicle of the Ming dynasty. Before ascending to the throne, Hongwu was a member of a rebel group led by a Muslim community leader named Guo Zhixin. Guo trusted Hongwu and gave him his protégée Ma as a wife. The fact that Ma and Muslim generals helped Hongwu conquer China led to his partiality toward Islam.³⁰ The panegyric runs as follows:

In the very beginning of the world, the heavenly book recorded the name. The great sage was sent to be born in the West, and received thirty volumes of the heavenly classic and enlightened all people. He was a king and teacher for myriad years, and [he was] the chief of all sages. He acted in harmony with the will of heaven and he protected a king, prayed for help five times [each day], wished for peace with all his heart, was devoted to the real Lord, benefited people in need, saved people from hardships, saw through this world and the other, controlled every soul and spirit, [and] was free from sins; his humaneness covered heaven and earth, his teaching [Dao] penetrated all ages, he vanquished the

27 Inscription in Qingjing Mosque in Quanzhou (dated 1350). Ibid. 67–68.

28 Inscription in Huaisheng Mosque in Guangzhou (dated 1350). Ibid. 112–113.

29 Lipman, *Familiar strangers* 38, 39, 41, 45.

30 Tan, *Cheng Ho* 170.

evil and returned to the One, the name of the teaching is pure and real, Muhanmode [Muḥammad] is the most exalted sage!³¹

This was certainly the most beautiful poem composed in Chinese in honor of the Prophet until Ma Zhu took up writing panegyrics in honor of Muḥammad. The official chronicle of the Ming dynasty depicts the Prophet as *payghambar*. "It is reported that the first king [of Medina] Muhanmode was born with supernatural intelligence and [he] subjugated all the countries in the West. All those countries respected him as *Bie'anba'er*, which is like a heavenly messenger."³²

By the end of the Ming dynasty, He Qiaoyuan (1558–1631) quoted Chinese Muslim praise of the Prophet in his *Fangyuzhi*, the seventh volume of his book *Minshu*, written in the reign of Tianqi (the name of the first era of Xizong, r. 1620–7).

The kingdom of Modena [Madina] had the sage (*shengren*) Mahanbade [Muḥammad]. He was born in the first year of the reign of Kaihuang [581]. The sage truly manifested beauty. The king of the country invited him. He reigned for twenty years and received the scripture. He liked good and hated evil. He served heaven and spread his teachings. The sun did not scorch [him]. The rain did not dampen his clothes. Even in the flames, he did not die. Even in the water, he was not exhausted. When he summoned a tree, it came.³³ The law was revived and enforced.³⁴

Living as a Muslim in China was, however, not easy. The Ming dynasty discouraged international trade, and it was difficult for Muslims to communicate with the Islamic world. By the sixteenth century, Muslim communities in China not only lacked books on Islam, but also did not have scholars who could read works in Arabic and Persian and explain them in Chinese. Lamenting the situation, Hu Dengzhou (1522–97) in Shanxi province began to educate Muslims in his home, and even supported them financially. His disciple Lan Zhouma moved the location of this teaching from his home to the mosque, where he established an institution of Muslim learning called *jingtang jiaoyu* (scripture hall education).³⁵ A *jingtang* is a hall in the same precinct, but separate from the mosque, where students studied the Islamic sciences. Muslim communities

31 Inscription in Qingzhen Mosque in Nanjing (dated 1368).

32 *Ershiwushi* vol. 1 (*Mingshi*), juan 332, liezhuan 220.

33 This refers to a miracle by Muḥammad.

34 He, *Minshu*, 165–7.

35 Li, *Zhongguo yisilanjiaoshi*, 506. For a thorough study of a network of Chinese Muslim scholars, see Frankel, Liu Zhi's journey.

financed the room, board, and tuition of students. The curriculum at the *jingtang* included the Quran, *ḥadīth*, *tafsīr*, *fiqh*, and grammar (both Arabic and Persian), in addition to Islamic philosophy and theology. Although Muslim intellectuals at the *jingtang* were not Sufis, they read Sufi literature, the two most common works of which were *Mirṣād al-ʿibād* by Najm al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 1256) and the *Lamaʿāt* by Fakhr al-Dīn al-ʿIrāqī (d. 1289).

Jingtang jiaoyu was the backbone of the *Gedimu* (traditional) Muslims.³⁶ It spread from Shanxi province all over China and produced eminent indigenous scholars who translated Islamic texts into Chinese. *Gedimu* Muslims emphasized the similarities between Islam and Confucianism and explained Islamic doctrine in Confucian terms.³⁷ In a sense, *jingtang jiaoyu* was the Chinese Muslims' response to their assimilation and acculturation into Chinese civilization; it signified that they truly belonged to Chinese society.

From the late seventeenth century, Central Asian Sufism started to substantially impact China's northwestern provinces. This period is called the second tide, during which Sufi communities and national networks were firmly established.³⁸ Although literature related to Sufism was known to students of Islam and used as texts for Muslim education at *jingtangs*, as an organized religious movement (called *menhuan*), Sufi brotherhoods began to attract more followers in the late seventeenth century. While *Gedimu* Muslim communities were loosely organized (leaders of religious learning were called *ahong*, from the Persian *ākhund*), these leaders were itinerant and did not belong to a specific community; by contrast, Sufi brotherhoods were tightly knit with strong bonds between masters and disciples and religious solidarity among its members. Over the next centuries, the saintly lineages of the *menhuan* replaced the *Gedimu* communities and linked Sufi followers throughout the northwestern provinces, thereby posing a political and economic threat to the central Chinese government.

2 The Rise of Chinese Muslim Literature

Despite the fact that Muslims had lived in China for many centuries, they did not initially produce Islamic books in Chinese. In 1616, Xu Guangqi (1562–1633),

36 *Gedimu* is the Chinese rendering of the Arabic word *qadīm*, meaning old, though it often means 'traditional.'

37 Wang, *Glossary* 37.

38 Gladney, *Muslim Chinese* 41.

a famous Catholic high official in the Ming dynasty, noted that “Islam has been freely tolerated for several dynasties even though its classics have never been translated as a verification of Islamic beliefs. Their places of worship are everywhere.”³⁹

With the establishment of the educational institution of *jingtangs* in the sixteenth century, the Muslim community was able to produce indigenous scholars who were well-versed in the Islamic sciences, in both Arabic and Persian. However, it was only in the middle of the seventeenth century that Muslim scholars began to seriously study Confucianism and write books in Chinese, in order to instruct their fellow Muslims, those who did not understand Arabic or Persian, and to teach non-Muslims about Islam.

The lack of Muslim works in Chinese, the language of the Confucian empire, must have been keenly felt by the seventeenth century, when the Jesuits, led by Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), succeeded in converting Confucian elites to Catholicism; they did this with the help of their literary works—in Chinese—on Catholicism and western sciences, in which they employed Confucian philosophical terms and concepts. Ricci’s *Tianzhu shiyi* (The true doctrine of the heavenly Lord), a book on the Catholic catechism, attracted many Confucian literati to Christianity. Observing the great literary achievements of the Jesuits, who were so successful in engaging and converting the Chinese elites, Muslim scholars must have realized the importance of written works on Islam in Chinese.

Wang Daiyu, a scholar (*‘ālim*) in Nanjing, planted the seeds of Muslim literary works on Islam in Chinese by writing (in 1642) the first Sino-Islamic text, entitled *Zhengjiao zhenquan* (The real commentary on the true teaching).⁴⁰ For the next two centuries, from the middle of the seventeenth to the end of the nineteenth century, Sino-Muslims penned and translated Islamic books into Chinese, seeking agreement with Confucian ideas.⁴¹ They composed books on a variety of Islamic topics, including theology, philosophy, and rites, and translated Arabic and Persian books, many of which pertained to Sufism, into Chinese.

39 Kelly, *The anti-Christian* 297.

40 It is difficult to consider the *Han Kitāb* literary activity that started in Nanjing (where the Jesuits sojourned and actively worked to spread Catholicism) as merely a coincidence.

41 Rokuro Kuwata termed this period “the Renaissance in the history of Chinese Islam.” However, this is not accurate, as the term “Renaissance” signifies the revival of a tradition that once-existed but died out or was neglected, and in the history of Islam in China, as far as we know, there was no such tradition before the seventeenth century. See Kuwata, *Minmatsu* 377–8.

In the preface of his *Zhengjiao zhenquan*, Wang describes the general situation of Muslims in China and the need for them to write books in Chinese:

My ancestors came from Arabia as presenters of tribute to Ming Taizu [the first emperor of the Ming Dynasty, r. 1368–98]. They could determine the profundities of astronomy and could correct the errors in the calendar.... In the last three hundred years, though we have had time enough to become accustomed to the place, still we have not dared [to] forget our origins.

In my youth, I did not study the learning of the Confucians, so as I grew up, though I had rudimentary literacy, I could not be more than a sometime clerk. As I matured, I grew ashamed of my mediocre attainments, so I began to explore nature and principle and the annalistic accounts and on the side turned to the various philosophers. As I came to some understanding of the general meaning, I felt that their argumentation was perverse and their Way erroneous and mutually contradictory in places. Compared to Islam, they seemed as night and day. Though not wanting to speculate, I absurdly wished to leave worthy writings for posterity, to clarify [this matter] and arrive at correct [understanding]. So I met with the various thinkers and initiated much debate; though they persevered, they could not compete [with me], and I left them always in the wrong. Of those superior men who willingly submitted, every one regretted that there existed no complete guidebook to the Correct Teaching [Islam]. So whenever I had been among them, I went home and noted down what had been said. Furthermore, in leisure hours, I unsystematically organized my notes and collected them into several [categorized] sections. There was too much to keep, so I had to cut it back, and the result was forty chapters. The principles and Way [discussed] therein are all based entirely on reverence for Scripture, with reference to the commentaries, and I have not dared to interpolate my own personal feelings, to add or subtract, or divide the various scholars.⁴²

The book is composed of forty brief essays on the religion of Islam, and includes such topics as God, the creed, and the rituals. Using neo-Confucian philosophical terms and quoting Islamic sources in Arabic and Persian, he explains “the logic of Islamic theological, cosmological, and psychological teachings, many of which might not have made sense to the Chinese mind, especially if

42 Cited in Lipman, *Familiar* 76–7.

offered without attention to the subtleties of Chinese thought.”⁴³ He often borrowed key words from Confucian classics like *Lünyu* (*The analects*) to explain Islamic values.⁴⁴

In general, this conciliatory approach to Confucianism was further developed by scholars like Ma Zhu.⁴⁵ Like the Jesuits, Sino-Muslim scholars accommodated Confucianism to explain Islam, all without compromising the superiority of their own religion and remaining critical of Buddhism and Taoism the two other popular religious traditions in China. Since neo-Confucianism emphasized social and family ethics in a way similar to Islam, Muslim scholars attacked Buddhism and Taoism; Jesuits felt the same way and made an effort to criticize them, especially Buddhism, by associating it with idolatry and heresy.⁴⁶ This attitude toward the three Chinese religious traditions is understandable, as Confucianism was the predominant ideology and rejected challenges from Buddhism and Taoism. However, the Jesuits and Muslims took significantly different approaches to Confucianism. While the Jesuits turned to classical Confucianism to argue that the neo-Confucian interpretation of the universe deviated from the right path of Confucius’s original teachings, Muslim scholars accommodated the dominant neo-Confucian philosophical ideas in Islam.

Ma Zhu wrote a rhymed prose in honor of the Prophet (titled *Shengzan*); this was the first of its kind in the history of Islam in China. Carrying on Wang Daiyu’s thesis that Muḥammad is none other than the Non-Ultimate in his theological essay *Zhensheng* (Real sage, in *Zhengjiao zhenquan*), Ma wrote pious narratives about the Prophet of Islam, and included conspicuous elements that were rarely found in Wang’s essay. These pious narratives must have entered Sino-Muslim literature from the neighboring Islamic world. The prose also contains indigenous stories about Muḥammad, certainly taken from Chinese religious literature by Chinese Muslims who wanted to show Muslim and non-Muslim Chinese Muḥammad’s superiority over Chinese sages.

43 Murata, *Chinese* 22.

44 Lee, Islamic values 89.

45 Ma Zhu completed *Qingzhen zhinan* in 1673.

46 For example, Wang Daiyu referred to Fo (Buddha) as an idol and Fodian (Buddhist temple) as its shrine. Wang, *Zhengjiao* 35.

3 Ma Zhu's Life⁴⁷

Ma Zhu was born in 1640 in Jinchi (modern Baoshan), in Yunnan province. His Muslim name was Yūsuf. He claimed to be a fifteenth-generation descendant of Saidianchisiding (Sayyid Ajall Shams al-Dīn) who came from Bukhara, settled in China, and served as the governor of Yunnan province for the royal court of the Yuan dynasty under Kubilai Khan (r. 1260–94). Through Sayyid Ajall, Ma claimed to be a descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad (in the forty-fifth generation); thus, he called himself Sayyid Ma Zhu.

At the age of sixteen, Ma Zhu passed a prefectural civil service examination and became a *xiuca*i (licentiate).⁴⁸ In 1657, the royal court of Yongle, the last Ming claimant to the throne in Kunming (Yunnan province), appointed him *zhongshu* (an official for keeping confidential documents). He was soon promoted to *jinyishiyu* (the secretary of the royal archives). With the fall of the Yongle government in 1659, he retreated from public life and earned a living by offering private lessons.

In 1659, Ma published his first book, now lost, entitled *Chuqianlu* (Record of Ailanthus and Firewood). In 1664, at the age of twenty-five, he studied *Daode* (Taoism), and criticized Buddhism and Taoism. The next year, he moved to Wuding, where he studied Confucian classics under He Guanwu, a famous local scholar. As his scholarship matured, disciples flocked to him. In 1669, he wrote *Jingquan* (Standard methods and compulsion) in two volumes and was confident that it would be widely read and used for generations; once again, this book is no longer extant.

When Ma foresaw an impending political turmoil organized by Wu San Gui, who attempted to rebel against the ruling Qing dynasty, he left Yunnan province, traveled extensively and eventually reached Beijing, the capital of the empire. Ma appears to have supported himself in Beijing by private tutoring. In addition to his scholarship, his connection with the members of the royal family must have enhanced his status and attracted students. As is clear from the fact that he passed a prefectural examination at the age of sixteen, Ma was highly intelligent and had been deeply immersed in neo-Confucianism from an early age. From 1313 on, in order to prepare for the civil service examination, examinees had to study *Sishu* (The four books) annotated by Zhu Xi

47 This part relies mainly on Bai's three works: Ma Zhu, *Zhongguo*, and *Huizu*.

48 *Xiuc*ai was a title awarded to a person who passed licensing examinations at a local level in pre-modern China. Bai, Ma Zhu 926. But Hu Yubing refutes it, for there is no evidence that Ma received the degree. Hu, Qingdai 59 n.10.

(1130–1200), and *Sanjing* (The three classics), a total of 430,000 characters. Ma was one of the few who did this successfully, and this suggests that although he was a Muslim, in many ways, he was little different from any other non-Muslim Chinese, in terms of his neo-Confucian philosophical outlook on the universe and the nature of human beings.

Ma's stay in Beijing was a watershed in his life as a Sino-Muslim scholar; his transformation from an acculturated Muslim in Chinese milieu had begun. The city was the main center of dynamic academic, cultural, and political activity in the empire. In addition to neo-Confucians, Ma likely interacted with Jesuits and Muslim intellectuals. From 1674 on, Ma seriously dedicated himself to the Islamic studies; in 1683 he completed the first version of *Qingzhen zhinan*. To quote his own words:

At the age of thirty-five, I inquired into the Islamic classics and teachings and knew the origin of the mandate of heaven. Every day and night, I studied intensely. I began to feel stupefied and hollowed. Then, I came to be enlightened. After either listening to or visiting erudite masters, I completed *Qingzhen zhinan*.⁴⁹

While he was in Beijing, Ma tried, through his royal connections, to gain a state-sanctioned patent of nobility as a descendant of the Prophet, like the official recognition given to the descendants of Confucius. In 1682, he had written *Qingbaobiao* (Petition for praise) which became a part of the first volume of *Qingzhen zhinan*. In it, Ma explained how such preceding Chinese dynasties as the Tang (618–907), Song (907–1279), Yuan (1279–1368), and Ming (1368–1644) appreciated the virtue of Muḥammad, the true teaching of Islam and the descendants of the Prophet, and requested that the Qing emperor Kangxi (r. 1661–1722) grant him and his heirs state approval of nobility, just as descendants of Confucius had been honored for hundreds of generations. Though he might have dreamed of uniting Muslims throughout China under his leadership as an official Sayyid, unfortunately, his request was never answered.

In 1684, after fourteen years living in Beijing, he left. He traveled to various places, met many friends and scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*), and edited his work according to their comments. His book was widely circulated among Muslims. Four years later, in 1688, he arrived in his home province of Yunnan. He continued his scholarly activities and added material to *Qingzhen zhinan*. Around 1702, the book was composed of eight chapters. With two more chapters, written in

49 Ma, *Qingzhen zhinan* 7.

1707 and in 1710 respectively, the final version of the book was completed with ten chapters; this is what has reached us in modern times.

No one knows exactly when Ma died. Aside from his composition denouncing the Qalandariyya, we find the last trace of him in 1709, in a stone inscription commemorating the restoration of the tomb of Sayyid Ajall. We can safely assume that he died in 1711 at the age of seventy-one, since there is no record of his activity after the forty-ninth year of the Emperor Kangxi's reign, which fell between 1710 and 1711 according to the solar calendar.

Ma's contribution to the development of Chinese Islam lies in his attempt to acculturate Islam into the mainstream Chinese Confucian tradition. His knowledge of Confucianism was sophisticated enough for him to pass a civil service examination at an early age and to serve as a bureaucrat in the royal court. Unlike Wang Daiyu, who studied Islam prior to the Confucian tradition, Ma took up Confucian learning first. He was much more engrained in Confucian philosophy than Wang. This fact alone shows that he was in a better position than Wang, whom he admired, to elegantly explain Islam in the Chinese vernacular. While Wang opened a new era of explaining Islam in Chinese idioms, Ma furthered it by declaring that Islam is compatible with Confucianism.

4 *Shengzan*

Ma wrote a multi-volume work entitled *Qingzhen zhinan*; book 7 of this was entitled *Bazan* (meaning, 'Eight praises'), and chapter 9 of the *Bazan* is a panegyric entitled *Shengzan* (written around 1690).⁵⁰ At the beginning of the *Bazan*, Ma clarifies that the eight praises are derived from the praise for the ninety-nine names of God. The *Bazan* contains nine chapters: (1) the Unique One; (2) Omnipotence; (3) Mercy; (4) Creation; (5) the Unique Merciful; (6) Paradise; (7) Hell; (8) Judgment; (9) In praise of the sage. The name of the book, *Bazan*, and the order of its chapters seem to indicate that the ninth chapter, "In praise of the sage," was originally not part of the book, but a later addition.

⁵⁰ Approximately 30 years later, Liu Zhi (1669?–1728?) wrote a 5,069-character commentary on the main text of Ma's panegyric, adding the adjective "supreme" to Ma's original title and entitling it *Zhishengzan* (In praise of the Supreme Sage). He incorporated it as the seventeenth chapter of his *Tianfang zhisheng shilu nianpu* (The annals of the Supreme Sage of Arabia), the first biography of Muhammad in Chinese. Liu not only glosses Ma's text, but also offers his own interpretation (by theologically reflecting and drawing on Chinese intellectual and cultural heritage) with additional elements not found in Ma's work. See Liu, *Tianfang*.

It is not surprising that Ma, who claimed to be a forty-fifth descendant of Muḥammad, composed a eulogy of the Prophet, though we do not know the reason for its composition with certainty. Given that he visited numerous Muslim communities and discussed Islamic teachings with Muslim scholars for six years (from 1684 to 1690), he may have felt the need to compose a panegyric of the Prophet, or perhaps his fellow Muslims requested that he write it. It is also possible that he collected and pieced together popular panegyrics of the Prophet that were already in circulation among Muslims in China.

Shengzan contains hagiographical information, including theological reflections in Chinese philosophical terms and accounts of various miracles performed by the Prophet, whose superiority to Chinese sages Ma maintained. These anecdotes were used to praise the perfect Sage (i.e., Muḥammad) and in most cases were based on Islamic traditions on the life of Muḥammad, often rendered in a way that fit the local Chinese cultural milieu. Although Ma argued for the compatibility of Islam and Confucianism and closely agreed with Confucian criticism of Buddhism and Taoism, Confucian scholars would have frowned on such miraculous anecdotes related to Muḥammad, since neo-Confucian rational thinking has no place for the supernatural, as is clearly shown in the famous saying that Confucius did not speak of extraordinary things, force, disorder, or gods.⁵¹ Indeed, in the Confucian tradition, the ideal sage did not perform miracles, but civilized the uncultured by internalizing the way of heaven. Although Ma presented Muḥammad as the great teacher of civilization, he further emphasized his supernatural acts as convincing evidence of the superiority of the Islamic Prophet to Chinese sages. Ma's panegyric prose for the Prophet of Islam is thus woven around his appreciation of Muḥammad's miraculous qualities—which were unheard of in the rationalistic explanations of the world offered by the Confucian philosophy that dominated the Chinese.

5 Prophet and Sage

In Confucianism, the sage is the most ideal human being. In Chinese, a sage is referred to as *sheng*, and defined in the earliest etymological dictionary (*Shuowen*) as *tong*, meaning “to penetrate” or “to pass through”;⁵² thus, the word indicates that the sage thoroughly understands the ways of heaven.⁵³ The

51 *Lünyu* 7:21, online: <https://ctext.org/analects/shu-er#n1271>.

52 Zhongguo, *Shuowen* ix, 1086.

53 Taylor, Confucianism 182.

character *sheng* is composed of the radical or signific *er*, the word for ear, combined with the phonetic *ting*. With the signific playing a prominent role, the word *sheng* has the sense of the sage as one who hears. In terms of the visual and auditory metaphors of wisdom, the Greeks saw, but the Chinese heard.⁵⁴

In ancient books like *Shujing* (The book of documents) and *Shijing* (The book of odes), the sage primarily possesses “the royal ideal of the sage king” who receives, by his virtue, the mandate from heaven and becomes the focal point between heaven and earth.⁵⁵ Confucius (551–479 BCE) transformed this traditional sage-king image into a more universal ideal and focused on ordinary human beings, not on the king: Confucius aspired to be the one who attained the supreme virtue of *ren* (humaneness), the most ideal man. This means that anyone who attained the supreme Confucian virtue of *ren* could become a sage, even if he was not of royal birth. Attainment to sagehood is, however, almost impossible.

Zigong said, “If there were a man who gave extensively to the common people and brought help to the multitude, what would you think of him? Can he be called benevolent (*ren*)?” The Master said, “It is no longer a matter of benevolence (*ren*) with such a man. If you must describe him, ‘sage’ (*sheng*) is, perhaps, the right word. Even Yao and Shun would have found it difficult to accomplish as much.” (*Lünyu* 6:30).

The Master said, “I have no hopes of meeting a sage (*shengren*). I would be content if I met someone who is a noble man (*qunzi*).” (*Lünyu* 7:26).⁵⁶

In *Lünyu*, Confucius emphasized the noble man (*qunzi*), more than the sage. The former, the noble man, is the one who strives to attain the highest virtue of *ren*, while the sage is the one who has already reached the goal. Although his disciples and later Confucian literati viewed him as the sage, Confucius did not think of himself as one: “How dare I claim to be a sage or a benevolent man? Perhaps it might be said that I learn without flagging and teach without growing weary (*Lünyu* 7:34).” For Confucius, sagehood was an almost impossible goal to attain. It was, indeed, the highest ideal.

It was Mencius (372–289 BCE) who presented sagehood as a universal ideal (*Mencius* 4B:11) and as an attainable goal for human beings. For him, the sage is the man who discovers human nature (*Mencius* 6A:7), and there are diverse ways to reach sagehood. The sage par excellence is the one who has combined

54 Ibid. 182–3.

55 Kim, *The righteous* 61.

56 Quotations of the *Lünyu* are taken from Lau (trans.), *Confucius*.

all the sagely qualities of purity, responsibility, and harmony. Mencian thought on the attainability of sagehood was further developed by neo-Confucian scholars from the tenth and eleventh centuries: for them, the sage “establishes the ultimate of humanity (*renji*)” that all men can learn, even without being born with innate knowledge. Thus, reaching sagehood became the primary goal for neo-Confucians. The neo-Confucian concept of the sage is closely bound to its cosmology. In the neo-Confucian scheme of cosmology synthesized by Zhu Xi (1130–1200), principle (*li*) is the origin of the universe. In other words, it is the great ultimate (*taiji*), or the non-ultimate (*wuji*). The great ultimate refers to the state after the appearance of forms, while the non-ultimate denotes the state of reality before the appearance of forms: the two form a unity.⁵⁷ Everything in the universe is endowed with principle in its entirety, just as “there is only one moon in the sky but when its light is scattered upon rivers and lakes, it can be seen everywhere.”⁵⁸

In order for myriad things in the universe to be produced, the principle material force (*qi*) carries it: “There is principle before there can be material force. But it is only when there is material force that principle finds a place to settle. This is the process by which all things are produced, whether large as heaven and earth or small as ants.”⁵⁹ Principle and material force are interdependent and complementary: they are never separated from each other. The former is above the realm of corporeality and has no corporeal form, while the latter is within the realm of corporeality and contains impurities.⁶⁰ Neo-Confucian scholars

arrive at [an] essentially organic view of the universe. Composed of matter-energy [material force] and ordered by the universal principle of organization [principle], it was a universe which, though neither created nor governed by any personal deity, was entirely real, and possessed the property of manifesting the highest human values (love, righteousness, sacrifice, etc.) when beings of an integrative level sufficiently high to allow of their appearance, had come into existence.⁶¹

The interplay of principle and material force leads to the important issue of human nature. Every individual thing in the universe is formed with the

57 Chan, *A source book* 465.

58 Ibid. 638.

59 Ibid. 637.

60 de Bary, *Sources* i, 699.

61 Needham, *Science* 412; Chan also quotes this in *A source book* 636.

principle that is contained in material force. That principle is called the nature (*xing*). In other words, any individual thing has its own nature and this nature is the same as the principle of the thing. Human nature, as a principle, is humaneness, rightness, ritual decorum, and wisdom. Since principle has nothing in which to inhere without the material force and concrete matter of the universe,⁶² human beings are “born of material force, endowing their physical nature and the ‘human heart/mind’ with feelings and desires.”⁶³ The sage is the one who receives the material force in its purest aspects.⁶⁴ According to neo-Confucian thought, the originally clear nature of the human being is like a pearl immersed in impure water. Its luster cannot be seen, for human desire obscures it. If those who receive the material force in its impure state realize this and attempt to remove the pearl with its originally clear nature from human desire, then they can become sages.

The term ‘sage’ used by Chinese Muslim scholars should be understood in this neo-Confucian context. It refers to the most ideal and exemplary human being, who penetrates the way of heaven (*tiandao*) and is devoid of any connotation of divinity. The primary goal of Confucians is to attain the status of sage. Sagehood is “an ideal that stood as the end point of the cultivation and learning process.”⁶⁵ Put more succinctly, it was “thought to be realizable within one’s own lifetime.”⁶⁶ This is, however, possible only as a theory, for in reality no Confucian scholar claimed to have attained such sagehood in his lifetime. In the Chinese context, it is not uncommon to use the term sage to describe non-Chinese religious figures. Such was the case with the Buddha who was also referred to thus.

For Chinese Muslims of this period, Muḥammad’s sagehood (unlike that of Chinese sages) was ordained before the creation of the world: Muḥammad, as the Supreme Sage, is a cosmic figure through whom God created the world. This constituted a radical break from the traditional Confucian concept of a sage. Chinese Muslims explain Muḥammad’s cosmic status by means of the Confucian concepts of the non-ultimate, supreme ultimate, and human ultimate. Furthermore, he performed miracles and engaged in battles, both of which were not considered part of sagehood in Confucianism. Muslim scholars projected Muḥammad beyond the Confucian paradigmatic person of the sage.

62 Chan, *A source book* 623.

63 Yao, *An introduction* 107.

64 Fung, *A history* ii, 554.

65 Taylor, *The religious* 43.

66 Ibid.

6 The Superiority of Muḥammad

Ma clearly praises Muḥammad's superiority to Chinese sages:

(His) Way surpasses the Three Sovereigns (*Sanhuang*)
 (He is) Called the Great Sage by Confucius
 (His) Virtue excels that of the Five Emperors (*Wudi*)

The Three Sovereigns and the Five Emperors is a traditional Chinese expression referring to “a pantheon of cosmogonic demigods, mythic culture heroes, and cosmic powers who lived during the primordial dawn of the universe, in the more recent protohistoric past, or in *illo tempore*.”⁶⁷ Although the exact identification of the sovereigns and emperors remains unsettled, they are “a group of unusually gifted or even suprahuman beings who made cultured life possible and brought human beings from a period of unstructured chaos, animal wilderness, inchoate disorganization and illiteracy into a period of cosmic order, civilization, social organization and learning.”⁶⁸

Like Wang, on the basis of the same fictitious conversation between the minister Pi and Confucius, Ma boasts that Muḥammad excels the Chinese cultural paragons:

The chief minister Pi asked Confucius,
 “Are you a sage?”
 “I am merely a man who has studied widely and remembered much.”
 “Were the Three Kings sages?”
 “The Three Kings were good at employing wisdom and courage; whether they were sages I do not know.”
 “Were the Five Emperors sages?”
 “The Five Emperors were good at employing morality; whether they were sages I do not know.”
 The chief minister of Song said in amazement:

67 Sommer, *San huang wu di* 522–3.

68 Ibid. 523. Regardless of the historicity of the figures, they were remembered by the Chinese as cultural paragons. For the Chinese, they are symbols of civilization: the inventor of divination, agriculture, cattle raising, and medicine; the discoverer of the use of fire; the architect of the cosmos, and so on. Dividing human history into four periods, Shao Yong (1011–77), one of the five early neo-Confucian masters, described the period of the three sovereigns as spring and the period of the five emperors as summer. In these two golden periods, the human world acquired all its cultural institutions and grew. In comparison to them, the time in which Shao Yong lived was in decline.

“Then who do you think is a sage?”

Confucius’ expression changed for a moment.

“Among the people of the western regions there is a sage. He does not govern, yet there is no disorder; he does not speak, yet he is trusted spontaneously; he does not reform, yet his influence prevails spontaneously. He is so great that none of his people can give a name to him. I hear that he is a sage.”⁶⁹

Ma ends the quotation by commenting that Confucius knew that the Prophet was the real sage. Though he does not state it specifically, Ma interprets Confucius’s reference to the sage from the West as Muḥammad. The text above is different from the original one in *Liezi*, which Ma uses and in which Confucius is quoted as saying that “I suspect that he is a sage, but I do not know whether he truly is or not.”⁷⁰ This skeptical remark is not found in Ma’s comment.

Given Ma’s faith in Islam, it is to be expected that Confucius, the greatest sage of all time, put Muḥammad on a higher plane than the Three Sovereigns and the Five Emperors. In Ma’s lifetime, the state’s cult of Confucius as the great sage continued and revering him was a religious duty for the Chinese. In such a cultural milieu, it was daring for Ma to claim the superiority of Muḥammad through the words of the Chinese sage. As a scholar who endeavored to make Islam and Confucianism compatible, Ma ranks Confucius highly. According to him, Confucius was the one who realized the mandate of heaven in the East; although born after the creation of the world, he knew the beginning of the world; prior to the termination of the world, he knew the end of the world. In the eyes of Ma, praise of Muḥammad by a man as knowledgeable as Confucius is persuasive proof for the superiority of the Islamic Sage to Chinese minds.

In order to further claim Muḥammad’s superiority to Confucius, Ma put forward “six graciously exalted honors” that showed how Muḥammad surpassed all the sages:⁷¹

69 Ma, *Shengzan*, verse 16. The sage from the West in *Liezi* is likely to be Laozi, who was said to have gone to the West to build the ideal society that he could not establish in China. This myth was so popular that when Buddhism was introduced in China, Buddha was regarded as the very picture of Laozi. The conversation regarding the sage from the West drew the attention of Buddhists and Christians in China: they used it to support their claims that their religious figures (i.e., Buddha and Jesus) are superior to traditionally revered Chinese heroes, including Confucius.

70 Its original text from *Liezi* is different from the above. See *Liezi*, juan 4 Zhongni; Graham, *The Book of Lieh-tzu* 78.

71 Ma, *Shengzan*, verse 43.

1. While previous sages had been allowed to worship only in the temple of the pure and real, the Sage could do so anywhere.
2. Whereas all the sages resorted to water only for ablution, following the mandate of the Lord, the Sage could use sand when water was not available.
3. The teaching of the whole sages was confined to the present time and particular place, but that of the Sage lasts forever and reaches around the world.
4. The rebels' possessions were returned to the Sage.
5. The dignity of the Sage spread farther than that of the other sages, and when the Sage was on campaign for a month, the rebels heard about him and ran away.
6. All the sages could barely save themselves, let alone others, whereas the Supreme Sage could save everyone, since he was endowed with the full capabilities from the Lord when Islam was brought.⁷²

Although the criteria for comparison are undoubtedly subjective and biased in favor of Islam, as is shown particularly in the first and second honors, they clearly represent Ma's wholehearted effort to claim the superiority of Muḥammad to any other sages in the Middle Kingdom. Unlike the Chinese sages, the Islamic Sage "thoroughly comprehended the inscrutable and the spirits and knew the processes of transformation (*Qiongshen zhihua*), completed and reported his mission, and returned to the Real [God]."⁷³

In order to impress Chinese readers with the greatness of the sage, as an explanatory note to the above verses, Ma quotes a famous Chinese Muslim tradition (not attested in official records), that the Ming dynasty emperor Wuzhong (r. 1506–22) acknowledged the superiority of Islam over Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism:

The Emperor Wuzhong of the Ming dynasty commented on various teachings and said to his retainers. Although Confucianism opens up (the knowledge of the issues of) things, and accomplishes the undertakings (of men),⁷⁴ it does not know the processes of transformations. The teachings of Buddhism and Taoism are similar to the knowledge of trans-

⁷² Ma, *Shengzan*, verse 43.

⁷³ Ibid. 47. Ma took the expression *Qiongshen zhihua* from *Yijing* (Book of changes), Xici xia. The translation is taken from Legge, *The I Ching*, 390.

⁷⁴ Ma took the expression *Kaiwu chengwu* from *Yijing*, Xici shang. The translation was taken from Legge, *The I Ching*, 371.

formations by seeking the truth to the utmost, but they cannot complete their missions and return to the Real. All these teachings grasp a part of the whole truth. Only the Pure and Real can recognize the teaching of the Lord and is the profound original right principle. Thus, the teaching has been transmitted for ten thousand generations, lasting for long with heaven and earth. Only the Pure and Real can open up (the knowledge of the issues of) things, accomplish the undertakings (of men), thoroughly comprehend the inscrutable and the spirits, know the processes of transformation, complete and report their missions, and return to the Real.⁷⁵

Unlike the Chinese sages, Muḥammad takes care of people in this world and the next. In this world, the sage shows people how to comprehend the Right Way by his teaching and the Real Classic.⁷⁶ In the next world, as an intercessor, he enables his followers to enter paradise by obtaining the amnesty of the Real Lord. His involvement in the heavenly sphere was shown in his heavenly journey (i.e., the *mi'rāj*), by means of which wise men began to understand the veracity of the Sagely teaching.

The supremacy of Muḥammad is often expressed through similes to natural phenomena. Following the Sage is to understand that one must be grateful to the source of moisture, not to rain or dew, meaning that all phenomena were created for and out of the Sage: "Grace is not rain, nor dew. The moistener is profound."⁷⁷ A similar verse was employed in discussions of the Muḥammadan light (*nūr Muḥammadī*): "Light is not from the sun, nor the moon. The Illuminator is far away."⁷⁸ This cosmic Muḥammad is one of the most popularly recurrent themes in Islamic piety toward Muḥammad, especially in Sufi literature: although Muḥammad, as the seal of the prophets, was the very last of the series of the prophets in history, he was the first in essence. This is reflected in the famous *ḥadīth* that states that Muḥammad was a prophet when Adam was between water and clay. Indeed, Muḥammad "serves as the place of gathering of all those universal and particular forms and meanings which are displayed throughout the universe."⁷⁹

Inheriting the tradition, Ma praises the pre-existence of the Prophet and raises him up to the illuminating cosmic being that embraces every existence in the universe. "Great is the Sage! He was given a life prior to the existence

75 Ma, *Shengzan*, verse 47.

76 The Real Classic is a reference to the Quran.

77 Ma, *Shengzan*, verse 49.

78 Ibid. verse 48.

79 Bakhtiar, *Sufi* 10.

of the heaven and earth, and born after the ten thousand sages. His clay was splendid and his name hung on the heavenly tree.”⁸⁰

Quoting *Tianjing* (The heavenly classic, an unidentified book, not the Quran), Ma comments that after the creation of the world, the Real Lord ordered the angel Gabriel to make a shell out of the soil (from the center of the earth) and all the fragrant clays, into which He put the spiritual light of Muḥammad and everything in the world: then, the essential Muḥammad was sent to the interior of the lantern in the throne (*‘arsh*) in heaven. Ma claims that this is the proof that Muḥammad penetrated “the root of the high and low and the past and present.”⁸¹ When Adam was created, the Real Lord put the clay in the crown of Adam’s head. That is, Muḥammad, as the very essence of the universe, encompasses the whole universe, although he was born as the descendant of Adam and the last prophet in historical time. The glorious status of Muḥammad is evidenced again in a pious narrative that Ma quotes from *Tianjing*: in the highest place of the seventh heaven, the Real Lord made a cosmic tree the length and breadth of which are so vast that it takes two thousand five hundred years to reach, and flying angels on every leaf of the tree worship the precious sign of the Lord, that is Muḥammad, the name of the Prophet.⁸²

Ma again extols the supremacy of the sage, this time as the leader of this world and the next: “The chief of both worlds. The paragon of the myriad heavens.”⁸³ Although the way of the Sage was propagated thousands of years later, it was delivered from the most distinguished of all the sagely teachings, penetrating the origin of heaven and earth. Comparing the everlasting truth of the sagely teaching with temporal life and wealth, Ma laments those who do not follow the sage:

Life span does not match that of Lugemani (Luqmān).
Wealth does not match that of Sulaimani (Sulaymān).
The way does not match that of the Sage.
Life has a limit of time and comes to an end.
Opulence has a limit of time and is exhausted.
The Way of the Sage lasts with the heaven and earth,
And shines with the sun and the moon.
Even though there is a different road in teaching,
The most stupid are not susceptible to change.⁸⁴

80 Ma, *Shengzan*, verse 5.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid.

83 Ibid. verse 45.

84 Ibid. verse 49.

Ma supports his verse by quoting Confucius, who said: "Men are close to one another by nature. They diverge as a result of repeated practice. It is only the most intelligent and the most stupid who are not susceptible to change (*Lünyu* 17:2)."⁸⁵ Ma warns against heretical teachings that claim to be true and confuse people, comparing them to *wufu*, a stone that resembles a jade: "A *wufu* pretends to be a jade."⁸⁶

Every human being is able to acknowledge the supremacy of the Sage and follow his teaching. If there is anyone who talks about his inability to do so, he merely "Draws a line on the ground and ceases."⁸⁷ In *Lünyu*, when Ranqiu, a disciple of Confucius, expresses his inability to follow the teaching of his master, because his strength has been exhausted, Confucius said to him, "A man whose strength gives out collapses along the course. In your case you set the limits beforehand (*Lünyu* 6:12)."⁸⁸ Quoting the exact saying of Confucius, Ma exhorts people to comprehend the principle of the right teaching:

There is a man who says that he knows how august the right teaching [Islam] is, but does not practice it. There is also a man who practices the right teaching, but does not comprehend its principle. Both of them are like those on the road: some did not yet start the journey; others are not willing to go further when they are halfway to the destination. They draw a line and limit themselves, saying "I will stop here." How can they know there is an everlasting joy waiting for them? You dare not move forward.⁸⁹

Moreover, those who give up walking on the road to the right teaching are like the blind screening themselves: even if they stay under the sunlight and moonlight, they feel only darkness without any light. They will never be able to obstruct the teaching of the Supreme Sage. Ma says: "Even if the disease becomes incurable, how can it hurt the light of the sun and the moon?"⁹⁰ The Sagely teaching will always shine through every corner of the whole universe. None can possibly harm it.

In Confucian thought, the primary role of the sage is to teach people how to live properly and in a morally upright way. He teaches savages by his impeccable virtues and turns them into civilized and cultured people. Under his

85 Lau, *Confucius* 143. Ma explains that the most stupid people are in a state of confusion; they are fixated on what they are content with and do not move. They cannot accept the supremacy of the Sage and his teaching.

86 Ma, *Shengzan*, verse 49.

87 Ibid., verse 51.

88 Lau, *Confucius* 82–3.

89 Ma, *Shengzan*, verse 51.

90 Ibid. verse 52.

excellent guidance, the world becomes an ideal place of peace and harmony: law and order are maintained not by force, but earnestly, from the heart. Taking over the Confucian ideal of the sage as a civilizer, Ma explicitly expresses that the sagely teaching of civilization and culture in the human world began to prosper with the advent of Muḥammad, the Islamic Sage. In a grandiose comparison with the generation of the cosmos, Ma starts the first verse of his prose with praise of Muḥammad as the great master who brought civilization to humanity. "After heaven and earth, myriad things came into being. After the sun and the moon, the heaven and earth became bright. After the Sage, civilization flourished."⁹¹

Just as the traditional Chinese ideal of the sage teaches mankind how to live a civilized life, Muḥammad is the ideal master of civilization who has swept away all heretical teachings and established Islamic ethics. In Ma's prose, Buddhism represents the heretical teachings, and Confucian moral ethics is employed to explain the Islamic teachings the Sage brought. The symbolic use of Buddhism and Confucianism creates the image of the Islamic Sage familiar to the Chinese. In order to enhance such an image, Ma employs Chinese historical, religious, and cultural anecdotes. It was in the time of the Sui (581–618) and Tang (618–907) dynasties that "heretical teachings thrived in the West. Law and order were demolished, and distinction between the high and the low vanished. Dignitaries lowered themselves to Buddhist monks. The way of teaching became enfeebled, and the true teachings were abandoned. Ordinary people praised the Buddha."⁹²

In order to rectify this chaotic state, it was hoped that Muḥammad would come. Ma explains this in a cosmological fashion: "Were it not for Muḥammad, I [i.e., God] would not have created the heaven and earth and the ten thousand things."⁹³ This is a Chinese rendering of a famous *ḥadīth qudsī*: "*Lawlāka mā khalaqtu l-aflāka* (Were it not for you, I would not have created the universe)."⁹⁴ Notably, Ma compares the appearance of the Prophet with that of Confucius. In Confucian tradition, there is a saying that "If heaven did not give birth to Confucius, the ages would have been dark like a long night."⁹⁵ In a similar vein, with the advent of the Prophet, Ma claims, darkness dissipated.

91 Ibid. verse 1.

92 Ibid. verse 2.

93 Ibid. verse 3.

94 Schimmel translates it "If you had not been [i.e., but for your sake], I would not have created the spheres"; *And Muhammad* 131.

95 Li, *Zhuzi yulei* vi, 2350.

Ma emphasizes that Muḥammad was illiterate and the Real Classic came from heaven. Considering the Chinese culture that valued literacy highly, it was difficult to persuade the Chinese to accept the illiteracy of the Sage and Muḥammad's prophethood. Nevertheless, Ma declares Muḥammad's inability to read or write, and the Lord revealed the Real Classic: "Who said he was able to read and write? All people said heaven granted [the Real Classic]."⁹⁶ Ma further explains the heavenly origin of the Real Classic:

The classic says, "The Sage did not know a letter, nor was he able to write a book. The Lord ordered heavenly immortals to dictate the Heavenly Classic. It was impressed on his heart and issued from his mouth. What he said became the Classic. No clever or learned man of all the ages under the heaven can add or delete a letter." Thus, *Zhengjiao zhenquan* [by Wang Daiyu] says, "If the Lord ordered the Sage to know a letter and to be able to write a book, the Real Classic was said to be the work of the Sage and gathered the suspicion of the world. Then, the classic is not the Real Classic, the teaching is not the Real Teaching and the sage is not the Real Sage." The illiterate Sage transcends all the sages, because heaven accorded [the Real Classic].⁹⁷

By obeying the mandate to suppress all the false heretical teachings, he brought about an orderly world. The image of a sage with a sword does not fit well with the neo-Confucian ideal of the sage who does not resort to violence, but uses his virtue to civilize people. The image of Muḥammad as a ruler is more like a combination of the image of a king, prevalent in such pre-Confucius sages as the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors who were engaged in battles, and the image of the sage Confucius as a teacher who made every effort to bring peace and order through his sagely virtues. The dual image of the sage as a ruler and master is further embellished by Muḥammad's extraordinary virtues that cannot be found in secular rulers and teachers. Ma proclaims: "He lives in this world, but his heart does not."⁹⁸

The illiterate Sage who received the real classic from heaven is the great master and, at the same time, the king. He rectified all the delusions of the lawless and disorderly world that was in chaos: "As a king and master, serving

⁹⁶ Ma, *Qingzhen zhinan*, verse 39.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid. verse 31.

heaven, [he] rectified all the delusions by conquest, [his] way managed heaven, earth, and humans.”⁹⁹

Ma explains that by being elevated to the most exalted status, the Sage became a king, and by revealing the secret of the way, he became a master. At the time of the Sage, Ma continues, various heretical teachings were popular, but the Sage upheld the mandate, conquered, and rectified those heresies.¹⁰⁰

The supreme cosmic pre-existent luminous kingly sage Muḥammad, the paragon of all the myriad sages, relieves this world and the next, manages heaven, earth, and human beings, and brings civilization to the human world through his impeccable virtues and miracles.¹⁰¹ He is the source of the universe, from and for whom the real Lord created the world. Although a latecomer in the line of sages in history, he was indeed the first of all the sages, whose appearance was planned and praised in advance by heavenly immortals, spirits, and all creatures. Chinese history acknowledged his appearance, Confucius foretold the greatness of the sage, and Chinese emperors rushed to pay their deep respect to the Supreme Sage. Considering this marvelous and clear evidence to support the sage of the pure and real, Ma cannot but exclaim his deepest piety toward the sage with all his heart and soul: “How supreme! How supreme! Oh! Without the Sage, in whom can I take refuge? Without the Sage, in whom can a *momin* [*mu'min*] take refuge?”¹⁰²

Ma explains the Islamic Prophet by means of Chinese dictums to appeal to non-Muslim Chinese people. Yet he never compromises the supremacy of the Sage to any Chinese sages. For a thousand years (in the Chinese calendar), Muḥammad remained the Supreme Sage.

6 Conclusion

Writing under the pressure of the overpowering and dominant neo-Confucian ideology, Chinese Muslim intellectuals strove to prove Islam's compatibility with neo-Confucianism, the zeitgeist of the time and were careful to

99 Ibid. verse 18.

100 Ibid.

101 Although Ma knew about the neo-Confucian aversion to wonders and marvels, he was deeply drawn to praise the miracles surrounding the life of the sage. Considering that Ma attempted to present Islam as close to the Confucian worldview as possible, it is difficult to understand why he took up an issue that Confucian scholars surely dismissed as superstition. Perhaps this is evidence that Ma did not write his panegyric prose for Confucian elites.

102 Ma, *Qingzhen zhinan*, verse 57.

accommodate its tradition in their works, to such an extent that they were called Muslim Confucianists.

Such an endeavor reminds us of the early Christian attitude to Greek philosophy as was expressed by St. Augustine:

As the Egyptians had vessels and ornaments of gold and silver and clothing which that people departing from Egypt appropriated to itself as to a better use, so the doctrines of the gentiles contain more useful moral precepts; and some points are found in these philosophers concerning even the worship of God himself; which gold, as it were, and silver of theirs, the Christian should take from them for good use in preaching the gospel!¹⁰³

The difference is that while Christians could selectively employ Greek philosophy, and often condemned it as heretical, Chinese scholars (*'ulamā'*) were defensive and avoided criticism of neo-Confucianism, the dominant ideology of the state in which they lived as a minority. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the neo-Confucian dominated society of China, they had to accommodate the state ideology, as Buddhism, Christianity, and Judaism also adapted what Zürcher terms "cultural imperative";¹⁰⁴ thus Chinese Muslims incorporated Chinese values and idioms into their works. Facing the Chinese tradition, the Jesuits in China (led by Matteo Ricci) sought to find elements of compatibility between Catholicism and Confucianism, not in neo-Confucian metaphysics, but in classical Confucianism; thus, they failed to gain the approval of the Chinese literati of the time who were armed with neo-Confucian ideology. By contrast, Muslim intellectuals chose to explain Islam with neo-Confucian idioms.

Ma conceived Chinese Muslim images of the Prophet by creatively utilizing and furthering the neo-Confucian quest for human perfection. In the course of his writing, he did not deviate from Islamic tradition. The Muḥammadan light was expressed by indigenous Chinese as the supreme ultimate and non-ultimate, a creative synthesis of Islamic and neo-Confucian thoughts. Making use of neo-Confucian ideas, Ma never failed to present Muḥammad as the Sage who truly achieved the neo-Confucian ideal of being a perfect human being, an ideal that even Confucius confessed he had not yet reached. This was an audacious claim that was certainly frowned on and rejected outright by Confucian scholars. The neo-Confucian perfect sage is in the making, whereas the perfect

¹⁰³ Green, *On Christian doctrine*, 64–5.

¹⁰⁴ Zürcher, *Jesuit accommodation* 64.

Islamic Prophet had already been made by God; just as a lion cannot transform into a rabbit, even though he may have many rabbits in his stomach.¹⁰⁵

The classical Muslim devotion to the Prophet continued to shine through in the Chinese heritage. Ma Zhu meticulously utilized local traditions to praise the ideal prophet, and show that Islam shared a common intellectual and cultural foundation with the Confucian tradition; this explains why Ma and the later Chinese scholars ('*ulamā*') had no difficulty externalizing their pious feelings for the Prophet with reference to Chinese intellectual, cultural, and historical idioms. Chinese sages were considered, in modern terms, cultural ambassadors who taught humans how to lead civilized lives. Though intellectually and spiritually perfect human beings, they were not raised to the cosmic status of Muḥammad, from whose light all the myriad things were created. This fundamental difference between the Supreme Sage of Islam and the Chinese sages found its pious expression in Ma's panegyric, which painstakingly interprets, through Islamic mystical thought, Confucian religio-philosophical terms and concepts in order to vindicate the true nature of Muḥammad as the center of the universe (*axis mundi*), from whose light God created the whole world.

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¹⁰⁵ Shimada, *Shushigaku to yomeigaku* 16.

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PART 3
Perspectives



The Documented Life: the Emergence of a Civil Law for Proto-Citizens in Ottoman Cairo

Reem Meshal

Naturally destined to serve the communication of laws and the order of the city transparently, a writing becomes the instrument of abusive power; of a caste of “intellectuals” that is ensuring hegemony, whether its own or that of special interests: the violence of a secretariat, a discriminating reserve, an effect of scribble and type.¹



The Ottoman archive, on which so many historians now depend, is clearly an instrument of social documentation and, less obviously, a site of social invention.² Two textual institutions, the archive and the *sjill* (judicial registers), neither invented by Ottomans, yet innovatively administered by them, stimulate a process of legal reformation that defined early modern Ottoman society and altered its legal landscape in the tenth/sixteenth century. Most notably, these innovative reforms had the cumulative impact of transforming Islamic law from a religious law for Muslims into a ‘territorialized’ law, or as I argue here, a quasi-civil code applicable, even in personal status matters, to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. I make this claim based on my previous arguments, including those related to the heightened (though not absolute) agency of the individual, the diminishing authority of communal identity, and a subtle political transformation in the status of said individuals from ‘subject’ to ‘proto-citizen.’³

The enormous data bank that is the Ottoman archive creates a paper trail of the lives of countless, faceless masses, and provides the foundations for a subaltern history rarely glimpsed in premodern historical sources. Overwhelmingly, however, the quarry of facts that have been mined from the Ottoman archive

¹ Derrida, *Resistances* 15.

² Parts reprinted with permission from Meshal, *Sharia*.

³ For a fuller discussion, see Meshal, *Sharia*.

represent not only a narrative tool relaying a given historical tale, but also an instrument of quantification, for example, the number of women granted divorces, the number of marital contracts employing a “conditional clause,” or the status of religious minorities/slaves. Far less consideration has been given to the archive and the *sijills* (court registers) as institutions, and even less interest has been shown about how they not only document history but also alter the histories produced, by providing the textual footprints of an early modern proto-citizen. This alteration was made possible by a legal system more akin to a ‘civil’ court than its modern counterparts in the empire’s successor states.

Since the 1990s, scholarly production on the *sijill* has flourished, and along with it, our understanding of the textual differentiation and similitude employed by the records to delineate gender, religion, and class has also increased. L. Peirce was the first to use the term proto-citizen to underline the oft-neglected political ramifications of tenth-/sixteenth-century Ottoman legal reform in Syria. A. Sonbol, N. Hanna, R. Jennings, and N. al-Qattan have opened doors for a generation of scholars seeking to analyze and qualitatively assess the often-stilted textual tropes of the *sijill* from a perspective attuned to economic transformations and social (re)construction.⁴ T. Fitzgerald, G. Burak, and others have since broadened our understanding of the linkages between law, state, and society, with works addressing class, literacy, and early modern political and social change.⁵ B. Ergene has interjected a cautionary note with regard to the documents; he emphasizes the primacy of oral testimony over and above written documents, yet this perspective fails to explain the unusual preponderance of documents in these centuries, rather his view falls back on the well-established paradigm that documents were ‘suspicious’ in the eyes of Islamic legal theory, and subordinate, in terms of authority, to oral testimony.⁶ While not entirely without merit—we are not suggesting that oral testimony ceased to be of value—this perspective stubbornly ossifies Islamic legal history in the confines of an irrational paradox, one in which documents proliferated in practice, but remained a ‘legal fiction’ in theory. In any case, ambivalence toward written documents is not a position unique to Islamic law, but a prevalent phenomenon rooted in pre-Islamic and non-Islamic societies. To assume these positions are fixed and unchanging precludes us from making meaningful links between state, law, and society. If written records had limited use as evidence in court, what would motivate a bureaucratic state to devise

4 Sonbol, Women; Peirce, *Morality tales*; al-Qattan, Inside the Ottoman courthouse; Jennings, *Kadi*, court 133–72.

5 Fitzgerald, Reaching 5–20; Burak, *The second*.

6 Ergene, Evidence 471–91.

an elaborate system of archiving and authenticating millions of legal documents? What motivates ordinary people to lobby the courts for documents, significantly called *hujja musaṭṭara* (written evidence) if they were of little legal value as evidentiary proofs?

A more meaningful approach involves considering the archive of legal documents first as a repository of historical memory, and more presciently, as an institutional memory, as adept at forgetting as remembering. The documents of the Ottoman archive not only establish legal 'facts' on the ground, but, through dexterous textual manipulation, transform the political identities of its subjects. When considered alongside the established policy of permitting, even encouraging, non-Muslims to use the *sharī'a* court, even in personal status (family law) cases, a political and social portrait emerges of a conspicuously civil legal system.

That said, there is also no indication that the *sharī'a* courts' doors were only opened to non-Muslims in the Ottoman era. Nonetheless, in this period the individual's relationship with the court and with their respective sectarian and ethnic community was dramatically altered by the state's bold intervention into family law. The means by which this intervention occurred was the legal document, or more precisely the *hujja*. Amplifying the role of the state by mediating between its holder and the world, the *hujja* renegotiated the bonds between individuals and society. The *hujja*, and the archive that housed, authenticated, and duplicated it, cleaved the essential personhood from locale, community, and custom, and became the progenitor of a new political identity that rested on the enforceability of said *hujja*.

Before making this argument, however, we must resolve the oft-cited 'paradox' inherent to the logic of Islamic law on documents.⁷ How are we to explain the ambiguous status of the written document in theory and their proliferation in practice? While the secondary literature concedes that an increasing number of people began to use the courts and that more documents were generated, it fails to correlate this phenomenon with the histories produced. The assertion that theory and practice are hopelessly bifurcated makes an

7 Wakin, *The function* 11. What is more, this perspective ignores the equally contested role of documents in the history of western law. In eighteenth-century England, Gilbert's Law of Evidence was cited in support of the argument that a written deposition ought not to be admitted because "we cannot cross-examine" the declarant. See, *Birchal & Brook v. Kelly*, 77, 86. Rabel traced the statute of frauds to a French model; The statute 63. Beardsley also points to the influence of French procedure on the European tradition of preferring written proof: "French civil procedure is marked by a strong preference for written proof and by the tendency of French judges to avoid factual determinations that must be based on evidence which is complex or otherwise difficult to evaluate"; Beardsley, Proof 34.

integrated reading of the *sijill*, one that treats the document as a legal institution *and* as a social narrative, well-nigh impossible.

The source of the ambiguity surrounding documents lay in ancient, pre-Islamic concerns about their susceptibility to forgery and interpolation. If legal documents were mass-produced, as *hujjas* were, a mechanism for their mass authentication would need to exist. Insofar as it discouraged the free circulation of documents in the public domain and in individual hands, the archive assuaged the concerns of jurists like al-Ṭahāwī (d. 321/993), a leading Ḥanafī scholar.⁸ As a mechanism that minimized the risk of forgery or interpolation and contributed to the preservation of documents by the millions, the archive was part of the triumph of the document in Islamic legal practice, and its increasing importance in the lives of Ottoman subjects.⁹

1 The Textual Invention of the Proto-Citizen

Certainly not an Ottoman innovation, the practice of archiving was already customary in the ancient eastern Mediterranean and, we may assume that the Arabs knew of this institution at an early date. Indeed, there is “a short précis on the back of some papyri, intended to facilitate storing and reference. But there is no evidence of the existence of a central archive, as there was in Greek times.”¹⁰ But there was a central archive in Fāṭimid times, and Ibn al-Ṣayrafi

8 Rosenthal, Of making books 36. In the specialized domain of evidence, the unique authority of the spoken word represented certainty, the very embodiment of the ‘presence’ of the testifying human witness. Quintessentially, witnesses (*shuhūd*, sing. *shāhid*) are defined as “those present,” a quality that has two dimensions. The first is ‘presence’ at the word or deed borne witness to, and the second is ‘presence’ at the moment of litigation before a judge. In stark contrast to the written document, writes Messick, “[w]itnesses ‘carry’ testimony, ideally embodying (memorizing) the evidence involved securely within themselves from the moment of its original apprehension to the moment of its communication to the court.” The centrality of memory is reflected in the juristic literature on the conduct of judges (*adab al-qāḍī*). An oft-asked question in these manuals is, can judges appeal exclusively to their written records if they are unable to recollect the documents from memory? Prominent among those who argued that a judge’s “written records provide grounds for further litigation” in the absence of memory are the Ḥanafī jurists Ibn Abī Laylā (d. 83/702) and Abū Yūsuf (d. 181/798), who overruled the opinion of their founding father to attain this judgment. By contrast, the ninth-/thirteenth-century Shāfi‘ī al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277), who admonished judges who ratified documents issued from their own court and bearing their seals, before they had recalled it to memory”; *The calligraphic state* 210.

9 For a studied look at the evolution of archiving in the Ottoman period see, Meshal, *Sharia* 103–39.

10 Bjorkman, Diplomatic. Also see, Barthold, *Arkhivnīe* i, 145.

(d. 558/1162) calls the archivist a *khāzin*, while praising the Baghdad archive *al-khizāna al-ʿuẓma* ('the great archive') as a model.¹¹ The function of an archivist was to "file the originals of incoming documents, and the copies of the outgoing ones according to months, in folders with headings. A certain decline in this practice seems to have set in in Mamlūk times, and there were periods when the *dawādār* of the confidential secretary sufficed as an archivist."¹² Whether the central archives of the ancient Greeks or the 'Abbāsids was ever equivalent in sheer scale to the Ottoman archive is a question yet to be determined. Suffice it to say, the Ottoman archive remains the only extant historical archive that houses millions of legal documents of the general populace.

To establish a causal relationship between proto-citizenship and the mass production of legal documents, a direct link between the predictability and exceptionalism of the documents produced must exist. In other words, the selective memory of the archive, or the criteria by which it remains silent or communicative, cannot be arbitrary or unpredictable. Second, it hinges on two other characteristics—the document's embodiment of power, and its transportability. The transportable *hujja* was a 'mobile bill of a given right' because it allowed people to assert their rights before any chief judge in the empire. But how exactly did it contribute to the rise of proto-citizenship? "The archive ... names at once the commencement and the commandment ... the principle according to the law, *there* where men and god command, *there* where authority, social order are exercised, in this place from which order is given."¹³

The order arising from the commandment in Derrida's analysis of the archive is an appropriate lens through which to view the social and political ramifications of an increasingly documented early modern life. Possessing all of the prerogatives of record keeper—setting acquisition policies, institutionalizing the link between scholarship and information—the archivist produces knowledge by providing tangible evidence of memory for individuals, communities, and states. It is, however, an institutional memory defined in a prevailing political order that commands 'forgetting' as well as 'remembering.' Here, memory has a twofold component—long-term and short-term memory. The historian recognizes only the long-term memory, while the short-term memory, the impact of which is felt in its own time, is hardly considered. How does the document and its mode of remembering alter the life of the person who possesses it?

11 Wakin, *The function* 3–4; Messick, *The calligraphic state* 204.

12 Wakin, *The function* 3–4.

13 Derrida, *Archive fever*. "Archive" comes from the Greek word *arkheion*, the house of the archons, magistrates.

The individual is certainly no stranger to pre-Ottoman Islamic law, but the tenth/sixteenth century marks a critical turning point in the *sharī'a* court's rational and procedural definition of 'essential personhood.' As examples of the "Ottoman movement toward the modern," Pierce and al-Qattan add the birth of the "individual," "linkages with the European and Mediterranean worlds in the construction of physical and mental boundaries," including "new group consciousness," the preservation of "a local sense of the past" and "broad appeal to political ideology through the popularization of scholarly discourse."¹⁴

The 'territorialization of the law' is a necessary pre-condition of this early modern individualism. Territorialized laws separate essential personhood from local identity, privilege political geography, and subject "individuals and communities that may be otherwise diverse to one and the same law."¹⁵ For al-Qattan, the archive is principally responsible for this transformation. Because it contains official documents, which relate to the public and are at its limited disposal, the archive 'commences' the moment of transference from private to public spaces, from universal religious law to a territorial civil law for all subjects.

As the study of Ottoman law and society expanded, it drew a vivid portrait of the *sharī'a* court as a unified legal venue for Muslim and *dhimmī* alike. Fattal, who describes this as a process of territorialization, specifically of Ḥanafī law, noted that the consciously expanded notions of political sovereignty sought to extend judicial control over non-Muslims.¹⁶ Al-Qattan adds to this thread by directly linking "territorialization" to "the institutionalization of the record-keeping process and its housing in a public space."¹⁷ The connection she makes between 'archiving' and 'territorializing' the law, is a vital one. Her assessment of record keeping as a quintessentially political act, and her reading of the archive and the *sijill* as twin producers of political identity brings much needed stimulus to the scholarship on Ottoman *sijills*.

Al-Qattan's argument that the *sijill* facilitated the transformation of political identity through textual manipulation is well-served by the example of non-Muslims. "Reflecting socio-economic integration across religious communities as well as its limits, the court refracted religious identity through the prism of state authority, and in the process both highlighted and erased it."¹⁸ However, her conclusion that *dhimmīs* were becoming Ottoman subjects neglects to note

14 Askan and Goffman (eds.), *The early modern Ottomans* 2–3.

15 Al-Qattan, *Inside the Ottoman courthouse* 201.

16 Fattal, *Le statut* 357–8.

17 Al-Qattan, *Inside the Ottoman courthouse* 211.

18 Ibid.

that the equally innovative processes by which the identity of the majority—those who were already subjects—also changed. The great leap forward, I would argue, is not from *dhimmī* to subject, but from subject to proto-citizen.

The *sijills* ‘flag’ all sorts of people, most of them Muslim. For example, the courts flag foreign Muslims, slaves, freed slaves, those sentenced to prison, or those soon to be released from prison. Even more, race and phenotype were used to describe such people, including skin, eye, and hair color, as well as a description of distinct physical markings (such as scars). What is *not* flagged, however, is even more important. The most striking thing about the Ottoman *sijill* is its consistent silence on the ethnic or racial identity of the freeborn, local Muslim population. Cairo was a multi-ethnic city that was comprised of Turkic, Circassian, Bosnian, Nubian, Syrian, Maghribī, and Persian communities, to name a few. Yet, the massive data bank of the *sijill* is virtually silent on the ethnic makeup of Ottoman Cairo.

Given that earlier descriptions of Cairo depicted an open center of migration in the tenth/sixteenth and eleventh/seventeenth centuries, we would expect *sijills* from this period to be an ethnographer’s dream. Instead, we find that they communicate almost nothing about the ethnic or communal identity of Cairo’s inhabitants. The *sijills* never flag the skin color, ethnicity or linguistic affinity of its freeborn Muslim constituents. There are no discriminatory flags to distinguish Arabic-speaking communities (*awlād al-ʿArab*) from the waves of Turkish-speaking Turkic, Slavic, Georgian, and Circassian migrants flowing into the city. All inhabit the *sijills* side by side, blanketed in the textual silence of a selective amnesia.

The silence of the *sijill* on the Muslim, religious majority is thus deeper and more startling than we first realize. Omitting all references to ‘Muslim’ identity as well as ethnicity, the *sijills* produce a ‘generic Ottoman man and woman’ that were, increasingly, defined through the territorial laws of a bureaucratic state. For example, marriage contracts in Ottoman Cairo scarcely mention race, regional origins, or even linguistic affinity. In what was, even by the standards of the day, an international city, this is quite a feat. We are compensated, however, by the enormous amount of socioeconomic data on ordinary, common Ottomans, particularly Muslims.

Out of thirty-eight marriage (*zawāj/nikāḥ*) and engagement contracts (*khuṭūba*), six include the marriage of military (*ʿaskerī*) men to women of the civilian population (*raʿāya*), usually the daughters of local merchants (like the Sukkariyya, or sugar merchants) or scholars.¹⁹ Another ten men from Cairo also

19 Maḥkamat Ṭulūn, *Sijill* no. 165, doc. 1303; al-Bāb al-ʿĀlī, *Sijill* no. 66, docs. 45, 47; *Sijill* no. 96, doc. 1023; Qisma ʿAskeriyya, *Sijill* no. 5, docs. 6, 8.

wed women from Cairo,²⁰ one Khawāja (Persian merchant) wed his cousin,²¹ and fifteen soldiers (*‘askerīs*) wed the daughters,²² or ex-slaves/concubines, of higher ranking military officers.²³ At first glance these appear to be ethnically homogenous unions, as most slaves, concubines, and soldiers in the Ottoman Empire were recruited from the Balkans. Can we assume, however, that because the marriages were between soldiers’ families, they were ethnically homogenous? The ethnicity of the soldiers (*‘asker*) became increasingly difficult to identify as “the distinction between the Ottoman military and Egyptian civilians broke down, probably from about the middle of the 10th/16th century when merchants and artisans in Cairo enrolled in greater numbers in the Janissaries and ‘Azbān [i.e., a military unit].”²⁴ Moreover, there is no way of identifying the ethnic origins of the daughter of the soldier he is marrying or the former concubines/slave girls of the elite households. The absence of records thus becomes a device for expunging, erasing, and re-ascribing political identity in an otherwise culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse city.

Ayalon has shown that in the Mamlūk sultanate, racial rivalries played a prominent role in the competition between various Mamlūk factions. The hostility of the Circassians to the “other Mamluk races and their feeling of superiority is well documented in the contemporary sources.”²⁵ Curiously, and in spite of an Ottoman military policy that discouraged ethnic pride, military groups continued to identify themselves as Circassian or Rumi. Still, the idea that this identification is left over from the identity politics of the Mamlūk era does not explain why Ottoman *sijills* perpetuated this tradition. However, there may be an explanation for these ethnic markers.

The *sijills* simply recorded the standard textual protocol in describing slaves. While the number of military slaves drastically declined from the mid-tenth/sixteenth century on, slavery remained deeply embedded in Islamic military

20 al-Bāb al-‘Ālī, *Sijill* no. 134, docs. 6, 27, 66, 93; *Sijill* no. 66, docs. 2, 12, 218, 219, 238; *Sijill* no. 96, doc. 2820.

21 al-Bāb al-‘Ālī, *Sijill* no. 66, doc. 961.

22 Qisma ‘Askeriyya, *Sijill* no. 5, docs. 7, 23, 24, 29, 31; al-Bāb al-‘Ālī, *Sijill* no. 66, docs. 958, 954. In the latter case, the freeborn daughter of a freed Circassian soldier (*‘askerī*) marries a freed member of the Mutaḥarriqa militia.

23 al-Bāb al-‘Ālī, *Sijill* no. 96, doc. 2823. Qisma ‘Askeriyya, *Sijill* no. 5, docs. 9, 10, 11, 14, 18, 19, 22.

24 “Their military service was only nominally required,” writes Holt, “[but] their financial contributions bought them the protection of their corps ...”; Holt, *Miṣr*, *EL*².

25 While this may have been the case for Mamlūk and Ottoman soldiers, it was less true for recruits (*wāḥida*) from among the Arabs (*awlād al-‘Arab*), brought into the seven corps (*ojaqāt*) of the Ottoman garrison in high numbers toward the end of the century. By contrast, members of the *ojaqs* tried to prevent the *awlād al-‘Arab* from entering the army and from wearing “Rūmī” clothing; they even resorted to murder; Ayalon, *Studies* 318.

history. Therefore, in all probability, this is a residual effect, not of Mamlūk protocol, but of slave protocol. Yet, there are categories of Muslims for whom records do exist; these categories include the following unusual couple below.

In one rare document, a man and a woman, both Muslim, are identified by ethnicity. Cutting across class and ethnic lines, the document is an inventory of possessions belonging to a woman identified as a “Bedouin” married—by custom—to a “Circassian” soldier (*‘askerī*). Apart from being unusual because the ethnicity of both parties is listed, the document also mentions that theirs was a “customary marriage,” a term that came to be applied to any unregistered marriage. Indeed, the very notion of a customary marriage (*zawāj ‘urfī*) in modern Egypt, like a common law union in English jurisprudence, developed in contradistinction to the idea of marriage as a public institution after the law of 928/1521. But, the question remains, why was this woman flagged as a Bedouin? The simplest and most straightforward explanation is that she was not a resident of Cairo.

Outsiders or visitors to the city who were there for commercial or personal reasons, are flagged by geographic origins, that is, the village, town, or city from which they hailed. For example, one finds references to a “Fayyūmī,” a “Khawāja” (generally signifying a Persian trader from the Safavid Empire), and in the case above, a “Bedouin.” In one document, for example, the nuptials of a soldier (*‘askerī*) of the Mutaḥarriqa militia to the daughter of a Khawāja are announced.²⁶ In another, a man from Fayyūm married the daughter of a Khawāja.²⁷ Yet there is more going on than the demarcation between insiders (of the city) and outsiders. For instance, it should be noted, the Khawāja is recorded thrice. On top of his ethnic/regional origins, the *ṣijill* also flagged his sectarian (Shī‘ī), and professional identity. Like non-Muslims, he is ‘differentiated’ before being integrated into the *ṣijill* alongside Sunnīs. But, the integration of sectarian differences is more than textual or theoretical. Often, the records indicate a marital union across sects, as in the case of two marital contracts in which the daughters of Safavid Persians were wed to Sunnīs, one a soldier (*‘askerī*) and the other a Fayyūmī. But there are further layers of distinction, demarcation, and differentiation that disrupt the *ṣijill*’s textual silence on Muslims. The most startling is skin color.

In one marriage document, the groom, identified as a man from Cairo, wed a woman described as the “white” (*al-bayḍa*) “daughter of ‘Abdallāh” (*bt ‘Abdallāh*).²⁸ Out of thirty-eight marriage documents culled in this

26 al-Bāb al-‘Ālī, *Ṣijill* no. 66, doc. 32.

27 Ibid. doc. 191.

28 Maḥkamat Ṭūlūn, *Ṣijill* no. 165, doc. 962.

research, fifteen wed military men (*‘askerīs*) to white ‘daughters of the servant of God.’²⁹ The brides were ex-slaves and concubines of men who often occupied higher military rank than the grooms.³⁰ As mentioned, skin color was a textual indicant of one’s status as slave, or former slave. “One had to be fair-skinned,” writes Ayalon, “to be (in most cases) an inhabitant of the area stretching to the north and to the north-east of the lands of Islam; to be born an infidel; to be brought into the Mamlūk sultanate.”³¹ The Ottoman Empire recruited most of its *“kullar [commanders of slave forces] from the Christian peoples living within its boundaries,” or the Balkans and the Black Sea regions.*³²

While there is a strong temptation to see the flagging of skin color as reflexive of its essential role in defining personhood, it may also be essentialist. There is no way to exclude race as a conscious category of textual identity and personhood, but it is also a secondary attribute of personhood. Essential personhood, that which meets the conditions of ‘normalization’ and about which the *sijill* is silent, is determined not just by one’s status as a member of the Muslim majority, nor by one’s color, nor even by one’s status as a resident or outsider, but by one’s status as freeborn or (ex)slave. Like religious identity, one’s birth or sale into slavery was an inescapable mark of one’s social and political standing. While in the case of religious minorities it meant an implicit recognition of their marginal but protected status, in the case of slaves, it meant marginality, or alternatively, privilege.

The final category of Muslim flagged and physically objectified in the manner of a slave, were those convicted of crimes, or on the cusp of release from prison. Shaykh Naḥiyat al-Basātīn came to court to charge his son-in-law, and cousin, with defaulting on providing his daughter her promised *kiswa* (wardrobe) over a three-year period. He was able to produce the original marriage contract, signed in the court of the mosque of Qawsūn (?) in 1051/1641, and corroborated in his testimony by several witnesses.³³ Eventually, the husband himself confessed. What follows immediately thereafter is a physical description of the husband—a blond man, clean shaven, of medium build with a space between his brows (*mafrūq al-ḥājibayn*). In the *sijill*, this signals that the defendant, found guilty of dereliction of duty, was about to be sentenced—no

29 Qisma ‘Askeriyya, *Sijill* no. 5, docs. 7, 23, 24, 29, 31; al-Bāb al-‘Ālī, *Sijill* no. 66, docs. 958, 954. In the latter case, the freeborn daughter of a freed Circassian soldier (*‘askerī*) married a freed member of the Mutaḥarriqa militia.

30 al-Bāb al-‘Ālī, *Sijill* no. 96, doc. 2823. Qisma ‘Askeriyya, *Sijill* no. 5, docs. 9, 10, 11, 14, 18, 19, 22.

31 Ayalon, “Mamlūk,” in *EI*².

32 Ibid.

33 al-Bāb al-‘Ālī, *Sijill* no. 124, doc. 10.

indication is given whether this sentence was a fine or prison term. His place (temporarily or permanently) among the silent textual majority, is suspended.

There are, as such, outbursts of chatter, rather than an absolute textual silence maintained on ethnicity and phenotype in the *sijill*. This is the case with documents from the tenth/sixteenth and early eleventh/seventeenth centuries in Cairo, but may well have changed in later centuries. Proto-citizenship, however, hinges on the predictability and exceptionalism of the document's selective amnesia. In other words, the criteria by which silence and communication are maintained are not arbitrary or unpredictable.

The *sijill* does not flag and integrate religious differences alone, therefore, it also reconstitutes Muslim identity. A willful amnesia with regard to the geographic origins, ethnicity, or linguistic identities of the *sijill*'s Muslim inhabitants projects a false gloss of homogeneity onto their heterogeneous backgrounds. It also suggests that, more than the transformation of *dhimmīs* into subjects, we are witnessing a broader shift from 'subjects' to 'proto-citizens.' The territorialization of law pivotal to this process is best illustrated through the marriage law of 928/1521.

2 Territorialization of *Sharī'a* and an Islamic Civil Law—the Marriage Act

Question: Now that a sultanic decree has been issued commanding that no marriage be concluded without the cognizance of a judge, is a marriage [concluded] without such a cognizance valid?

Answer: No, lest it give rise to dispute and litigation.³⁴

An imperial decree issued in the time of Abū l-Su'ūd (d. 981/1574) made the registration of marriage before a court judge compulsory. With a single stroke of the pen, marriage, which in the Islamic legal tradition required no more than a signed document between a couple in the presence of two witnesses,³⁵ became a civil institution. The boundaries of this important institution were now placed squarely within the purview of the bureaucratic courts, regulated by the state and its jurists.

Marking the dawn of civil marriage, and the transformation of Islamic law into a territorial-civil law for all subjects, the *qānūn* of 928/1521 is one of the most important and overlooked laws ever promulgated in Ottoman history

34 Imber, *Ebu's-Su'ud* 165.

35 See Bousquet et al., 'Āda, in *EI*², and Schacht, Nikāḥ, in *EI*².

and Islamic social history. Coming almost three centuries before the adoption of civil marriage in the West, the *qānūn* compelled all subjects, without religious distinction, to register marital and divorce contracts in the court of the Ottoman chief judge.

To be certain, written marriage contracts had always existed and some people even registered them in the *qāḍī's diwān* (pre-Ottoman register). Nonetheless, this was probably not done systematically, as judges did not draw up the marital contracts. This was the job of a specialized notary (*ma'zūn*), who may have deposited the records with the judge, kept them himself, or given them to the married couple.³⁶ However we look at it, the great change was in the nature of what was private and what was regulated by the state: the pre-Ottoman procedure was private and the post-Ottoman procedure was regulated by the state.

Local jurists understood the weight of the moment; with its unprecedented bureaucratic intrusion into private spaces, it was a moment of transference for the law itself. Therefore, the law of 928/1521 was no small procedural adjustment; it represents a revolutionary social and political transformation, heralding the onset of what modern Europeans would call 'civil marriage.' In modern Europe, civil marriage was defined as a secular contract drawn before a civil magistrate that unites a man and woman in marriage; it became compulsory incrementally over the course of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. The 'secularity' of this civil arrangement is dubious on several grounds. First, the roots of the movement lay in the sixteenth century, when the Protestant Reformation rejected the Catholic view of marriage as a sacrament. Martin Luther declared marriage to be "a worldly thing ... that belongs to the realm of government," and Calvin expressed a similar opinion.³⁷ But, in most of Europe, marriages continued to require a religious ceremony until the French Revolution of 1792 introduced civil marriage—also by compulsion. In England, "Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act" of 1753 required that, to be valid and registered, all marriages must be performed in an official ceremony in a religious setting. In 1836, the requirement that the ceremony take place in a religious forum was struck down, and registrars were given the authority to register marriages conducted by non-religious officials.³⁸

In theory, civil law is secular in that it does not recognize religious obstacles to marriage. In practice, notwithstanding recent challenges from the gay community, the dominant conception of marriage in the West has remained Christian—monogamous and heterosexual. Nonetheless, civil law opened the

36 See Hallaq, *The Qāḍī's diwān*.

37 Wengert, *Harvesting* 175.

38 Outhwaite, *Clandestine* 3, 140.

door to interfaith marriage and to non-religious ceremonies in which one, or both parties, professed no religion. The differences and similarities between this, and the conception of civil marriage that developed in the Ottoman Empire, are many.

To begin with the differences, the classical marriage contract in Islam, and Judaism as well, has never been a sacrament; it was never more than a worldly legal contract between two individuals. An ancient forerunner of the Protestant marriage contract, it shares one important feature with its sacramental counterpart in Europe. In its pre-territorial stage, Islamic family law extends to the universal religious community—an Islamic law for all Muslims across geographic political boundaries. This formally changed with the edict of 928/1521, which made no distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims. Aside from pushing people into the courts, in practice, the new law had several consequences on marriage. We cannot say for certain how many marriages remained ‘unregistered’ or, as they became known, ‘customary.’ On rare occasions, however, we can find a reference to “*zawāj bi-l-‘urf*.”

Cutting across class and ethnic lines, the document mentioned earlier (an inventory of possessions belonging to a woman identified as a “Bedouin”), describes her as “married by custom” (*zawāj ‘urfī*) to a “Circassian” soldier (*‘askerī*). The impact on Muslim and non-Muslim, but especially on people of all faiths and classes, was significant, as amply demonstrated by the strategies adopted in soliciting *hujjas* from the court.

Bringing us back to the Derrida’s point on textual ‘commandment,’ archival documents embody power both as entities in stasis (preserved records in a fixed archive), and as entities in motion (as a copy of an original *hujja* which circulated freely in society). As a document in stasis, the *hujja* exists in the archive, as a preserved, albeit selective, memory accessed under restricted conditions. In motion, however, the transportable *hujja* carries one’s rights forward in society at large. The social relevance of the transportable *hujja* is made amply apparent by its necessity and consequent demand by people seeking to ensure their rights. Ordinary individuals, notably women and slaves, came to the courts requesting the issuance of a written *hujja*. Out of sixty-three requests for *hujjas*, fifty-one were filed by women, nine by former slaves, three by former peasant farmers, one by a sugar merchant, one by the gypsy community, and two by *waqf* holders. This makes some sense given the importance of having written documents in hand, but it hardly accounts for the number of people seeking *hujjas*—not merely as a record of a property right or contract—but as official writs of their status as freed slaves, as divorced women, as urbanites versus peasants and so on. Backed by the force of the state and recognized in any high court in the empire, *hujjas* penetrated the whole of society. However, the

high number of women seeking *hujjas* makes sense only when we recognize *hujjas* as pivotal to the erection of new categories of personhood, and their ability to deflect, deter, and regulate the conduct of others in one's community.

B. Braud and B. Lewis have made strong arguments for the autonomy the various communities in the Ottoman Empire enjoyed.³⁹ More recently, Cohen has interjected a more balanced view, in which certain aspects of Jewish communal life (for example, internal taxes, a system of mutual assistance, or regulations and covenants) were "assumed to have existed," but in which Jews also frequently appealed to the *sharī'a* courts.⁴⁰ This is true even in matters that concerned only Jews, including marriage and divorce (which, according to Jewish law, were forbidden from being presented to Gentile authorities) because Jews "viewed the court as an important part of the fibre of personal and community life."⁴¹

But, "[t]here was always a tension," writes Shmuelevitz, "between mild pressure and open conflict, between the desire to preserve the principle of [community] autonomy and the pressure for more integration, which arose chiefly from a variety of activities and demands in the administrative, legal, economic and, to some extent, even social fields."⁴² Citing numerous strategies of resistance, including a ban (by the Jewish community) against Jews resorting to the Islamic court, Shmuelevitz's work challenges the assumptions of older paradigms on communal autonomy. The observations of Shmuelevitz and Cohen on the *sijills* of Jerusalem, confirmed in this, and other emerging works, has yet to be correlated with a decline in communal autonomy vis-à-vis a civil law for all Ottomans.

The increasing frequency with which members of their community appeared before the *sharī'a* court led Jewish leaders in Cairo and Jerusalem to admonish them for mimicking mainstream cultural behavior, and to impose a ban on resorting to the Islamic courts. We know from the *sijill* that the Jewish community sometimes used various strategies to comply with this ban; specifically, Jewish community members might refuse to testify before a Muslim judge in personal status cases.

When two Christian men claimed to be married to the same woman, it was the possessor of the *hujja* who triumphed.⁴³ Dāwūd claimed he had recently wed Tuffāḥā through her brother's *wikāla*, while 'Abd Rabb al-Masīḥ claimed

39 Braud and Lewis (eds.), *Christians*.

40 Cohen, *Jewish* 8.

41 Ibid. 119.

42 Shmuelevitz, *The sijill* vii.

43 al-Bāb al-ʿĀlī, *Sijill* no. 124, doc. 267.

he had been wed to her in childhood through her father's *wikāla*. Even though they had never cohabitated, al-Masīḥ claimed that he had paid her father the dower as well as her maintenance expenditures for eleven years. Dāwūd was able to produce a written marriage contract, while ‘Abd Rabb al-Masīḥ was not and, predictably, he lost his case. The closing line read, “‘Abd Rabb al-Masīḥ was not believed.” But was al-Masīḥ lying? Such verbal agreements were customary, although judging by such cases, increasingly risky. It is not the validity of the arrangement that was in dispute, but rather, proof of the arrangement. Interestingly, neither the girl's father, nor any other member of the community was on hand as a witness in this case. The decision was reached on the authority of the *ḥujja* presented. In other words, Dāwūd complied with the marriage edict and registered his marriage contract with the court. But why did al-Masīḥ not summon witnesses who could have, potentially, overturned the validity of the *ḥujja*? If there was any veracity to his tale, surely someone could have vouched for him, or for the dowry and maintenance he had allegedly paid. The case below may explain why ‘Abd Rabb al-Masīḥ was unable to produce witnesses.

The parents of a Jewish woman alleged that their daughter was divorced from a man named Ishāq and that Ishāq had failed to pay (the remaining half of) the dower. When questioned, Ishāq denied the marriage altogether, challenging them to produce oral evidence (*bayyina*), that is, witnesses, in support of their claims. Proving or disproving such an allegation normally entailed summoning neighbors, relatives, and friends to testify that X was married to Y and cohabited at address Z. In fact, the parents left the court on a quest for witnesses only to return empty-handed. Not a single relative, neighbor or friend came forward to testify to their daughter's marriage and divorce. The persistence with which the parents searched for witnesses, and their lack of success in securing even one, suggests either an incompetent lie, or a desperate couple hopeful that the court would secure their daughter's rights.

Thus, in spite of the ban, many Jews continued to come to Muslim courts for rulings, even in matters that only concerned Jews.⁴⁴ However, they faced numerous obstacles, primarily in convincing other members of the community

44 Shmuelewitz, *The Jews* 68–73. Cohen provides examples of civil suits brought to court by Jews against other Jews over petty affairs and criminal charges, and even on claims dealing with movable property and real estate. This was because they “viewed the court as an important part of the fiber of personal and community life,” not because they considered the Jewish courts ineffectual or inferior. Furthermore, the Jewish community had every reason to trust the Muslim courts because “greater weight was often attributed to the testimony of Jews than that of Muslims, not only in actions of Jew against Jew, but also of Jew against Muslim, or Muslim against Christian”; Cohen, *Jewish* 121.

to testify on their behalf in the *sharī'a* court. A comparative study of these issues in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is necessary in order to determine whether, or how, change occurred over time, and in what direction.

The social or even physical cohesion of the community, something we can find in any North American or European city with a large immigrant population, should be separated from the question of its legal autonomy. The comparison with religious minorities in the West, particularly with regard to personal status laws, helps illustrate the point. Muslims, and other religious minorities, in the West are free to contract marriages and divorces in their respective religious courts or councils, but are not impeded from contracting a marriage or divorce in a civil court of law, should they choose to do so. And in either case, the marriage certificate must be registered with the appropriate bureaucratic office, much like in the Ottoman Empire.

Like their Muslim counterparts, therefore, a *hujja* was as essential to Christians and Jews seeking redress and the enforceability of a given claim, in the absence of witnesses, as it was to Muslims. A number of examples should suffice to demonstrate this point. Most Muslim women sought *hujjas* of divorce, or *hujjas* documenting a history of marital conflict, or even *hujjas* ordering a suitor to cease and desist.

The freed concubine of al-Ḥajj 'Alī the *qahwajī* (also her legal guardian or *wālī*), Khatūn bt. 'Abdallāh, "of white complexion," charged al-Zaynī 'Abd al-Rab al-Ḥaqān with "confronting her" and demanding that she cohabit with him, "as wives do ... without legal justification."⁴⁵ At issue in this case was a woman's right to consent in marriage. The defendant admitted to making such demands, but claimed that he had "married her" through al-Zaynī Muḥammad Ibrāhīm al-Yankasharī's *wikālā*; he produced a written document indicating that he had paid the advance dower and agreed to the amount of the deferred portion. He also claimed that she had received her dower in hand. When the judge sent a court-appointed witness to take Khatūn's testimony (outside of court), she took an oath denying that she had authorized al-Zaynī Muḥammad to act as her *wakīl*, or that she had received a dower in hand. Al-Ḥaqān's case was summarily dismissed because, the court stated, his dispute was with al-Zaynī Muḥammad, not Khatūn bt. 'Abdallāh, who was not a signatory to the written contract.

'Abida was another woman in need of a *hujja* to deflect the unwanted advances of a suitor, her ex-husband. She came to court accompanied by several witnesses from her neighborhood to testify that her husband Ḥijazī had divorced her and was now denying the divorce and trying to (re)claim his

45 al-Bāb al-'Ālī, *Sijill* no. 124, doc. 771.

conjugal rights.⁴⁶ Without documentation supported by eyewitness testimony, 'Abida's legal status, and that of thousands of women, remained dependent on the testimony of community members, and was subject to repeated challenge. 'Abida thus came to the court of her own accord to request that it block Hijazi's claims, and more importantly that it issue a written *hujja* of the divorce to pre-empt such claims in the future. When and if she should need it, the *hujja* allowed 'Abida to assert her legal rights without further need for witnesses. In cases such as these, the legal document rendered the community redundant as a source of 'witnessing.'

3 Conclusion

The documented life is an altered life. It is altered through the textual manipulation of identity, on the one hand, and through the mediation of texts between the world and the individual, on the other. Both redraw the perimeters of gender, essential personhood, and political identity to produce an early modern individual more detached from local custom than previously thought. Remapping the relationship between state and society, the archive territorialized Islamic law, mediated its transmission from private to public spaces, and negotiated its conversion into a civil code for all subjects.

If the 'civil' aspect of the law is associated with secular conceptions of law, however, then the Islamic courts applied something more akin to a 'quasi' civil law, because they upheld a strictly Muslim definition of marriage. For example, the religious prohibition of marriage between Muslim women and non-Muslim men was upheld. That said, limitations such as these exist equally in the West where, until recently, conformity to a Christian definition of marriage prevailed—a union was between one man and one woman. The recent movement to expand the definition to include homosexuals still falls short of a secular ideal recognizing all other possible forms of marriage, such as polygynous and polyandrous marriages.

Therefore, in the spectrum of an evolving understanding of 'civil law,' the *shari'a* court's adjudication of non-Muslim marriage and divorce shows that it upheld a model closer to the contemporary practice of civil law than to its modern counterparts in Ottoman successor states.

46 Ibid. doc. 104.

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The Geography of Historiography: West Asia as a Sub-Region of the Indian Ocean

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By using a flexible early modern time frame—from about 1500 to at least 1750—and also by encompassing a large geographical area, it is possible to see a significant change in recent scholarship on the Indian Ocean and its sub-regions. For the western half of the ocean, known as the Arabian Sea, historians have rediscovered or re-emphasized a number of local primary sources in Arabic, Persian, Indo-Persian, Ottoman Turkish, and Armenian. In this essay, I highlight several such sources, which include chronicles, treatises, institutional records, travel literature, and maps. These sources enhance and invite reassessment of an earlier historiography that depended heavily on European trading company archives and the interests those companies represented.¹ Many works based almost solely on European archives are of enormous value to Indian Ocean histories; however, my emphasis is on newly or re-discovered local sources that shift the perspective away from Eurocentrism. Just as Goitein's discovery and analysis of the Geniza documents opened up a new way of looking at the medieval Mediterranean and the Arabian Sea, these rediscovered sources provide a beginning for a similar process in the Indian Ocean region in the early modern period.

Scholarship based on recovered local sources strengthens the argument that the Middle East is part of a sub-region of the Indian Ocean that is bounded by India and East Africa, and more loosely linked with the rest of that ocean, and with Asia as a whole. The linkage of the Middle East by land to Central, South, East, and Southeast Asia via silk roads further strengthens the argument. The strong cultural and linguistic connections between Iran, Central Asia, and South Asia led to the term “Persianate” societies; these share tastes in art, poetry, and intellectual endeavors, and sometimes food and clothing as well.² Most of the influence of these Persianate societies was eastward, to Central and South Asia, most clearly to Mughal India from the time of Jahāngīr and his

1 Two influential works based primarily on European sources include: Lorimer, *Gazeteer of the Persian Gulf* and Steensgaard, *The Asian trade revolution*.

2 See, for example, Alvi, *The Shī'īs at Jahāngīr's court* 219.

Persian wife Nūr Jahān. These linkages call for a reconsideration of the concept of West Asia. While the “Middle East” may be a deeply entrenched designation, in this essay I argue for a nearly synonymous usage of “West Asia,” from antiquity through the early modern period, depending on the context.

The term “Middle East” is contested for numerous reasons, some of them political. Two or three generations ago, textbooks on the Middle East were likely to include North Africa west of Egypt. The region was largely Muslim and had experienced comparable types of imperial/colonial occupation, as Egypt and post-World War I geographic Syria and Mesopotamia had. Now, however, textbooks are likely to mention the nineteenth-century Deobandi movement in north central India, an area that is home to an Islamist ideology influenced by Deobandi pilgrims to the Wahhabi-ruled Hijaz. More recently, texts are likely to include Afghanistan and Pakistan, because of the influence of Saudi Wahhabis who fund Islamist schools there. Some scholars tend to think of Egypt as primarily part of Africa, and some would like modern Turkey to be considered part of Europe, although most of it sits in Asia Minor.³ The British Empire, who viewed the world from London, saw West Asia as the *near east* rather than the *far east*, which referred to China and Japan; this perspective long provided imperial names for these regions. In 1902, an American military theorist, Alfred Thayer Mahan, coined the appellation “middle East” (with a lower case “m”) to refer to the strategic region around the Persian Gulf where oil had recently been discovered. Before and during World War II, “Middle East” caught on as a contender to displace “Near East.”⁴ Thus, the term Middle East began to permeate all the disciplines and time periods of the region’s history, and was adopted (as *al-sharq al-awsat*) by people living in the region. For this essay, both the terms ‘Middle East’ and ‘West Asia’ include the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, all of geographic Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Turkey.⁵

Demarcating the sub-regions of the Indian Ocean is itself a matter for discussion. There is a widely used bifurcation of the Indian Ocean, in which the western region is designated as the Arabian Sea while the eastern portion, east of India, is known as the Bay of Bengal. Some see four quadrants in the Indian Ocean; there has also been a suggestion to rename it the Afrasian Sea, in order

3 Lewis and Wigen, *The myth of continents* 62–7; Bonine, Amanat, and Gasper (eds.), *Is there a Middle East?*

4 Lewis and Wigen, *The myth of continents* 65.

5 The less popular designation “Southwest Asia,” as a synonym for the Middle East (often without Egypt), was probably meant as a counterpoint to the widely accepted “Southeast Asia.” However, when we examine a map with lines of latitude and longitude, it is apparent that Southeast Asia is further south.

to better reflect its extent and influence.⁶ Here, I consider the whole of the Indian Ocean, but especially the Arabian Sea, as relevant to West Asian history, not only in the early modern period, but extending back into antiquity.

The time frame for this essay, roughly 1500 to 1750, includes the European presence but precedes the full-fledged European industrial revolution or the heyday of colonial imperialism, both of which change the nature of the discussion. Historians of the early modern period searched for an explanation for “the rise of the West” and posited European “exceptionalism,” that is, Europe’s inevitable development toward industrial capitalism; this explanation has been seriously challenged.⁷ Recent research on Asia in the same early modern time frame, published during the last half century or so, employs more local sources and offers convincing arguments of alternative forms of development and capital formation. Some of these “alternate forms” are detailed below, especially as they relate to Egypt and Persia. Often this same research also demonstrates that the Middle East interfaced with the rest of Asia and with Africa in a more productive way than it did with Europe, and thus strongly suggests that a significant portion of the Middle East looked to the Indian Ocean to meet its economic, political, and cultural objectives.⁸

Clearly, the early modern period does not stand alone; since antiquity, its characteristics have had roots in the interactions of West, South, Central, and East Asia, as well as East Africa, interactions that involved economics and the expansion of territorial influence. Archaeological research shows the presence of ancient maritime and overland trade between China, India, and West Asia, including trade between the Persian Gulf region and the ports of the Indus River civilization.⁹ Arab Muslim trading activity in South Asia began in the early second/eighth century, and Turkic Muslims continued to connect West and South Asia during the Delhi Sultanate, until, with the Mughals, we arrive at our early modern period.¹⁰ On a more distant front, trade with East Asia preceded Islam;

6 The northwest quadrant is between the Horn of Africa and the western coast of India; the northeast quadrant extends from the eastern coast of India to Southeast Asia; the south-western quadrant includes Swahili-speaking areas of East Africa, and also Madagascar; the southeastern quadrant starts in the mid-ocean and extends to Australia and the surrounding islands. For a visual representation of these quadrants, see cartographer Eric Olason’s site at <http://www.explorettheworldmaps.com/quadrants.html>. On the suggestion to call it the Afrasian Sea, see Pearson, *Port cities and intruders*, ch. 2.

7 For such a challenge to European “exceptionalism,” see Pomeranz, *The great divergence*.

8 For example, see footnote references later in this essay to scholars André Raymond, Daniel Crecelius, Murat Çizakça, Nelly Hanna, and Sebouh David Aslanian.

9 For example, Potts, *The Arabian Gulf in antiquity* ii.

10 Interested readers can find valuable information on West Asia–South Asia commerce before 1500 in Raychaudhuri and Habib (eds.), *The Cambridge economic history of India*: vol. 1, and Goitein and Friedman (eds.), *India traders of the middle ages*.

after the emergence of Islam, Muslim-operated vessels, notably dhows, sailed all the way to China.¹¹ Al-Mas'ūdī (d. 345/956), writing in the fourth/tenth century, tells us that Omani and Chinese vessels met at a pre-arranged port in the Malay peninsula.¹² These connections grew as Chinese exports increased during the Song period (960–1279 CE), and notably during the so-called Pax Mongolica (roughly 1240–1330 CE) during which time China was connected to Central and West Asia and to Russia.¹³ Trade during the Pax Mongolica refers to overland trade through the various khanates affiliated with the great khan in China. The post-Mongol Ming dynasty of China (1368–1644 CE) sponsored the export of heavy ceramics and porcelains and these were more cheaply transported by sea than by caravan. The Indian Ocean, including its western half, attracted the Ming regime's attention.¹⁴ In the first third of the fifteenth century, the Ming sponsored several large maritime expeditions, most of which were led by a Chinese Muslim official who may have been selected because of his previous interaction with other Muslims at ports near and far, from Malacca to Jedda. The purposes of the Chinese expeditions appear to include an impressive show of naval capacity, perhaps in order to discourage any would-be rivals or pirates and to seek new maritime trade opportunities, especially if the Ming ruler could garner new tribute payments in the process. Two of these expeditions, respectively, reached Hormuz in the Persian Gulf and Aden on the south coast of Yemen; a group of small, shallow draft vessels detached themselves from a third fleet in order to reach Mecca's port of Jedda via the Red Sea.

I now turn to the early modern period, and West Asia (as part of the Indian Ocean sub-region), specifically, its needs for work and labor, including slave labor.¹⁵ Groups and individuals moved itinerantly or permanently throughout the sub-region, and migrant labor from East Africa predominated in the Arabian Sea. Many laborers were from Abyssinia and neighboring regions and, therefore, were and still are referred to by the vernacular "Habshis." They migrated over several centuries to western India either as slaves or freemen, and usually traveled by way of southern Arabian ports, where some stayed permanently. Cultural and linguistic anthropologists, as well as historians of

11 Hudson, *The medieval trade of China*. Hourani describes a six-month coasting trip in his *Arab seafaring* 74–6.

12 Bathurst, *Maritime trade and imamate government* 92.

13 For example, Abu Lughod, *Before European hegemony*, ch. 5 and Mongol historian Endicott-West's review of Abu Lughod's book, 349–50.

14 Levathes, *When China ruled the seas* and Chan, *The Chien-wen*, Yung-lo, Hung-hsi, and Hsüan-te reigns.

15 For the study of the Indian Ocean slave trade, see Clarence-Smith, *Islam and the abolition of Slavery*; Alpers, *Ivory and slaves*; Campbell, *The structure of slavery*; Sheriff, *Dhow cultures*.

the nineteenth to twenty-first centuries are mining archives, travel literature (often European), songs, dances, musical instruments, and other artistic and material culture in order to identify the elements and processes that weave these groups together into Indian Ocean history.¹⁶

The task of tracing the Habshis in the early modern period is more difficult. For Gujarat, there are Indo-Persian and Arabic sources for them during the Mughal period.¹⁷ The peak of migration seems to have been in the tenth/sixteenth and eleventh/seventeenth centuries, when the Portuguese in India increased the local demand for household slaves.¹⁸ The number of East Africans involved is difficult to estimate, but clearly the demand for slaves in western India, Arabia, and the Gulf area—most often as household slaves, maritime crews, soldiers, or agriculturalists—created economic, social, and cultural linkages to the Arabian Sea region.

We have many scattered accounts of South Asians in the Middle East, including documentation of two Indian merchants who reached Aleppo by way of Basra in the early eleventh/seventeenth century.¹⁹ At the end of that century, and on a somewhat larger scale, Tipu Sultan, the Muslim ruler of Mysore in southern India, sent a delegation to Istanbul by way of Basra. Its purpose was to seek the Ottoman sultan's recognition of Tipu's legitimate political position; but the delegation also sought (and failed) to gain favorable trade arrangements and naval protection from the Ottoman navy against the British East India Company.

In this period, South Asians developed a huge interconnected, but not centrally planned commercial diaspora that covered most of the Indian Ocean. One region of that diaspora consisted of India, Persia, Central Asian Turan, and western Russia.²⁰ This regional segment had a commercial node at Astrakhan, the port where the Volga River flows into the Caspian Sea. Merchants of the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf played supporting roles even in this south–north axis away from the sea, and the whole Indian commercial diaspora to which it was connected “extended throughout the Indian Ocean region, was highly visible in the Ottoman empire and penetrated into Chinese Turkistan.”²¹

16 Alpers, *The African diaspora* i, 41–76.

17 Pankhurst, *The Ethiopian diaspora to India* 189–222.

18 Alpers, *The African diaspora* i, 45; Thorton, *African diaspora passages* i, 125–63.

19 Faroqhi, *The Ottoman empire* 138, where Faroqhi cites historian Halil Sahillioğlu.

20 Dale, *Indian merchants*, ch. 1. “Turan” was the early modern name for a region that was comprised of adjoining portions of modern Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan. In ancient times, it was apparently Persian-speaking. C.E. Bosworth, *Central Asia* iv. In the Islamic period up to the Mongols, in *Elr*, 5:2, 169–72.

21 Dale, *Indian merchants*, xi.

Over the course of the eleventh/seventeenth and early twelfth/eighteenth centuries, “thousands and perhaps tens of thousands” of South Asians lived in Persia and worked there as “moneychangers and/or moneylenders ... retail and wholesale merchants, commodity brokers and financiers.”²² This relocation highlights the concept of “Persianate societies,” mentioned above, and the possibility of those societies interacting and cooperating.

Turning back to the West Asian point of view, the early modern Ottoman Empire, which controlled a huge part of the region, was undergoing a transformation. In the first half of the tenth/sixteenth century, Ottomans expanded to Syria, Egypt, some North African ports, Yemen, Mecca’s port of Jedda, southern Iraq with its inland port of Basra, the eastern Arabian region of al-Ḥasā’ and the nearby port of Qaṭīf.²³ By the second half of the tenth/sixteenth century and into the next, the Ottomans were less able to depend on conquest and military fiefs to buttress their economy and began to introduce tax farming. They also developed the commercial possibilities of the empire, including a number of far-flung ports and especially the prominent city of Cairo. The Ottoman administration looked for ways to develop both internal and external trade in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. Within the empire, commercial interconnections were strengthened. A recent study provides an energetic, present tense impression of the complexity.

Rice cultivated in Egypt is consumed in the sultan’s palace and in North Africa, Macedonian tobacco is smoked in Egypt and Anatolia, wood from southeastern Anatolia is used in Egypt, fezzes from Tunis are imported throughout the Levant, Syrian silk is woven in Anatolia, and the surviving African slaves, arriving in Libyan Tripoli, are sold in the market of Izmir.²⁴

Other research argues that, in the tenth/sixteenth century, a group of pashas and admirals favored the expansion of Ottoman naval activity into the Indian Ocean in order to stop the progression of the Portuguese, and also to develop commerce in the Gulf, East Africa, India, and beyond.²⁵ Far less attention has been paid to this group than to the pashas and admirals associated

²² Ibid. 1.

²³ On the Ottoman expansion in Syria and Egypt, see Finkel, *The history of the Ottoman empire*, chs. 4 and 5; for Yemen, Jedda, and Basra, see Casale, *The Ottoman age of exploration* 65–6; 42; 88, respectively; for eastern Arabia, see Teles e Cunha, *The Portuguese presence* 211–2.

²⁴ Panzac, *La caravane maritime* 207, also cited in and translated by Hathaway and Barbir, *The Arab lands under Ottoman rule* 155.

²⁵ Casale, *The Ottoman age of exploration*.

with the Mediterranean—further evidence of a Eurocentric bias on the part of both European and Turkish scholars of Ottoman history.²⁶ Membership in this “Indian Ocean faction” and its countervailing opposition changed over time; Sokollu Mehmed Pasha (d. 937/1579), who served as grand vizier from 973/1565 through 987/1579, was among its later supporters.²⁷ Sultan Süleymān (d. 974/1566) appointed him to the post the year before his own death, and then Sokollu Mehmed served both Selim II and Murad III for an unusually long tenure as grand vizier. His earlier political appointments had given him broad experience and perhaps led him to aspire to Ottoman global expansion. To make his case for maritime expansion in the Indian Ocean, Sokollu used the travelogue of a naval commander and scholar, Seydi Ali Reis (d. 971/1563), especially the enthusiastic pro-Ottoman rhetoric that can be found throughout the book. The travelogue has recently enjoyed a new popularity and is highly relevant to the argument that West Asia was part of an Indian Ocean region; it is a significant contribution to the body of Asian sources for our time period and deserves some attention here.²⁸

In 960/1553, Seydi Ali was appointed commander of the Indian Ocean fleet and the following year he attempted to sail a newly refurbished fleet of some fifteen galleys from Basra to Suez. Naval encounters with the Portuguese slowed his progress and storms blew his now reduced fleet off course, toward the coast of Gujarat. Further maritime mishaps left his remaining vessels unseaworthy, and thus Seydi Ali became an accidental Ottoman envoy in India, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Persia, as he made his return journey home. This adventure became the subject of his travelogue.

Because of his rank, religion, and possibly his knowledge of poetic Persian, Seydi Ali was well-received by Muslim governors and rulers.²⁹ The fact that he was Ottoman was itself important, usually in a positive way, as local elites were aware of the string of Ottoman conquests that had begun in 922/1516 with Mamlūk Syria. Seydi Ali mentions that several Muslim Indians he met expressed the hope that the Ottomans might save them from Portuguese interference, to the point, he says, that a local faction hoped that Gujarat might become an Ottoman province.³⁰ Seydi Ali tells us that he reached an unlikely

26 Ibid. 3–12.

27 Ibid. ch. 5.

28 Alam and Subramanyam, *Indo-Persians travels* 9.

29 Alam and Subramanyam, *Indo-Persian travels* 103–4. The Indians appreciated Seydi Ali's knowledge of Persian poetry (Nizāmī, Ḥāfiz, Sa'dī, and Amīr Khusraw); this is a good example of the far-reaching significance of Persianate culture in the geographic space and time period of this essay.

30 Ibid. 104 and Casale, *Ottoman age of exploration*, 121.

meeting of the minds with the Tīmūrid ruler Humāyūn, in Delhi, about the relative power of the Ottoman and Tīmūrid rulers. According to Seydi Ali, the two men agreed that the Ottoman sultan was the supreme political leader, the *pādishāh* ("lord king"), above the rank of all other rulers. When Seydi Ali reached Persia, the Safavid Shāh Ṭahmāsp asked him which city, of all the cities he had seen, was his favorite. The short answer was Istanbul, but Seydi Ali tells us that he responded with poetic verse in order to emphasize his loyalty to his empire.³¹ This is the pro-Ottoman embellishment Sokollu later used to support the ambitions of the "Indian Ocean faction." Ultimately, the hope of extending Ottoman political and commercial dominance into the Indian Ocean was not fulfilled. Still, the very existence of such a "faction" implies a corrective to Eurocentrism in Ottoman maritime historiography, which is usually focused on the Mediterranean Sea.³²

Ottoman Egypt, in particular, presents special challenges for historiography of the early modern period. While the earlier Mamlūk period is well-documented, there appears to be a paucity of chronicles from after the Ottoman conquest in 923/1517 until the time of the historian al-Jabartī (1166–1240/1753–1825). In recent decades, it has been demonstrated that many histories (of varying quality) written during the Ottoman period need more attention.³³ Historians are also making more use of the Egyptian institutional records as they have become more accessible.³⁴

One topic of investigation is the impact of the Cape of Good Hope route on Asian trade that had formerly passed, via the Red Sea, through Cairo, or overland to Ottoman Mediterranean ports. Some historians argue that the rerouting of most Indian pepper and other commodities around the Cape seriously damaged the economy of the Ottoman Empire, especially that of Cairo.³⁵ This argument maintains that Cairo was no longer generating significant revenues from the trans-shipment of pepper to the rest of the empire or to Europe. However, other historians note that Cairene merchants astutely switched from trading pepper obtained along the Malabar Coast of India to coffee grown in

31 Alam and Subramanyam, *Indo-Persian travels* 115–6.

32 Casale, *Ottoman age of exploration* 9–12.

33 Crecelius, al-Jabartī's *ʿAjāʾib al-athār*. R.A. Meshal has brought attention to an underused Egyptian source from the Ottoman period: Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Ḍamīrī, *Qudāt Miṣr fi l-qarn al-ʿāshir wa-awāʾil al-qarn al-ḥādī ʿashar*, MS. Cairo: Dār al-Kutūb. See Meshal, *Sharia and the making of the modern Egyptian* 14–5.

34 Crecelius, Introduction 247–61.

35 As a strong example of this theory, Suraiya Faroqhi cites the historian Sabri Ülgener, *İktisadi Çözülmenin Ahlak ve Zihniyet Dünyası* (Istanbul: DER Yayınları, 1981). This citation is in her *Subjects of the sultan* 45.

Yemen, in order to continue to use the Red Sea as the main conduit to Cairo.³⁶ While coffee had been consumed in West Asia since the ninth/fifteenth century, the new market in Cairo led to its increased use and the spread of coffee-houses, despite lively disputes about whether, like wine, it should be forbidden because it affected the mind.³⁷ After the mid-twelfth/eighteenth century, coffee grown by slaves in the Caribbean successfully competed with Yemeni coffee. In 1177/1764, Cairene merchants obtained from the pasha a command prohibiting the sale of Caribbean coffee in Egypt.³⁸

Early modern Cairene merchants, as well as merchants in Muslim majority regions, engaged in a number of types of commercial relationships (all according to *sharī'a* or customary law), among them, *commenda* (*muḍāraba*), partnership contracts (*'aqd shirka*), bills of exchange, letters of credit, and powers of agency (*tawkīl muṭlaq*). In addition, they benefited from brokers and agents who lived in foreign ports. Notably, these were products of earlier centuries, not the early modern period. The longevity of these “structures” was not, arguably, the end result of the rigidity of law, but rather the flexibility of law and custom over time to meet changes in trade patterns and individual needs.³⁹

Another example of flexibility relevant to capital formation, like the *commenda* and partnership contract mentioned above, is the use of endowments (*awqāf*) to fund the growth of early modern cottage industries in Cairo. These industries pressed linseed and olive oils, extracted sugar, tanned leather, crafted leather items, wove cloth, and made dyes for cloth. Some argue that this growth—albeit not generalized—was funded by revenues redirected from endowments that had been established by the guilds themselves, and that such endowments were an early modern phenomenon.⁴⁰ For the Mamlūk and Ottoman periods, a pattern of the redirection of trust wealth in Egypt has been documented, largely from records of the ministry of *awqāf* and from *sharī'a* courts.⁴¹ Sometimes, after the death of the *waqf* founder, and usually within a century of the establishment of the trust, political elites used the legal concepts of exchange (*istibdāl*) or the relinquishment of rights (*isqāt*) to place

36 This historiographical line goes back to André Raymond, *Artisans et commerçants*, whose main source was *sharī'a* court records.

37 Hattox, *Coffee and coffee houses* that uses Zayn al-Dīn 'Abd al-Qādir b. Muḥammad al-Anṣārī l-Jazīrī l-Ḥanbalī's manuscript *'Umdat al-ṣafwa fi ḥill al-qahwa* for the social and legal aspects of coffee in the tenth/sixteenth century.

38 Raymond, *Artisans et commerçants* i, 157.

39 Hanna, *Making big money in 1600* 54–9.

40 Hanna, *Artisan entrepreneurs* 171–8.

41 Crecilius, The waqf of Muhammad Bey 57–81. Crecilius cites (78 n. 68) two publications of Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn that support a similar pattern in the Mamlūk period. These are: *al-Awqāf* and *Fihrist*.

trust land or other forms of wealth back into circulation.⁴² During the early modern period, there were significant developments in this practice: the guild members themselves (rather than the political elites) began to redirect the guild *waqf* wealth; this intriguing change awaits further research.

Another aspect of *waqf* that may have ramifications is the phenomenon of cash-lending endowments, a practice that seems to have been established by the central Ottomans in the mid-tenth/sixteenth century. Endowments that generated significant incomes lent money on condition of the payment of interest, though the agreements were carefully worded and carried out so as not to draw attention to the collection of interest, a practice forbidden by many scholars (*‘ulamā’*).⁴³

The guild products mentioned above—linseed oil, olive oil, sugar, leather items, cloth, and dyes—were sold in Cairo, in rural areas of Egypt, and in sub-Saharan Africa. I am aware of no evidence that these items were sold more widely via the Indian Ocean, and South Asians would not have been interested in buying cloth or dye—except as novelties—since they exported so much of both. Sugar was an important commodity for trade in both the Mediterranean and the Red Sea throughout the eleventh/seventeenth century, although the relative amounts are unknown.⁴⁴

This alternate form of guild development can be linked to the Indian Ocean through the profits of these entrepreneurial manufacturers. Well within the early modern period, the case of one individual illustrates—though does not alone prove—the point. Aḥmad al-Jalḥī (d. 1118/1707) produced linseed oil and became head of his guild. As he made more money and expanded his social connections, he began to invest in imports. When he died, among his extensive warehouse property were Indian textiles and Indian pepper, both commodities of similar value; there was also coffee from Yemen valued at three times the worth of either the cloth or the pepper.⁴⁵ His income from linseed oil pressing led directly to al-Jalḥī’s entrepreneurial investment in these commodities that arrived via the Indian Ocean and Red Sea.

Flexibility and alternate forms of production and capital formation have also drawn attention to Persia. Some historians see Persia around the turn of the eleventh/seventeenth century as the first early modern state in the

42 Crecelius, *The waqf of Muhammad Bey* 59.

43 Çizakça, *Cash waqfs* 313–54; Dale cites Çizakça and writes, “Such use of waqf funds for this purpose may have occurred in Iran and India as well, but it is a well-documented aspect of the waqf institution in Ottoman territories.” He also notes that some well-endowed temples of South India also loaned money. Dale, *Empires and emporia* 218.

44 Hanna, *Making big money* 81–90.

45 Hanna, *Artisan entrepreneurs* 113.

Middle East; specifically, they point to Shāh ‘Abbās’s famous monopoly over the production and marketing of silk.⁴⁶ There is scholarly discussion about whether Shāh ‘Abbās was a founding father of Iran or if he was more an opportunistic autocrat who had some good outcomes, such as his elaborate, centrally-located capital city of Isfahan.⁴⁷ The Shāh did persuade—for a while, at least—the English and Dutch to purchase silk at a Persian port. These Europeans took their silk home by sea, rather than buying Persian silk from the usual Ottoman-controlled Mediterranean outlets of Izmir and Aleppo. While historians have been using the same sources for some time, we know of one newly rediscovered source, an eleventh-/seventeenth-century Persian volume that dates the establishment of monopoly over silk to 1028/1619, years later than some historians had assumed.⁴⁸ It seemed logical that the conquest of the hitherto independent silk-producing province in 1004/1596 had coincided with the imposition of a monopoly over silk, suggesting that ‘Abbās was following a plan. Silk production took place in the province of Gilan, along the southwestern shore of the Caspian Sea. In 1012/1603–4, about seven years after Gilan had become a royal domain, ‘Abbās force-marched Armenian merchants and their families from the old city of Julfa (in the Caucasus region disputed by the Ottomans and Safavids), to a suburb of his chosen capital city of Isfahan, which became known as New Julfa. His actions only make sense if ‘Abbās intended to have these merchants use their established Armenian networks to export Persian (mostly Gilan) silk to Europe.

The Dutch, in 1611, and the English, in 1616, made their first forays into the Gulf, each hoping to buy silk from a Persian port. In 1614, five years before the new dating of the monopoly (i.e., 1028/1619), ‘Abbās took from the Portuguese the ramshackle port of Gamrun (Gambroon), which overlooks the narrowest part of the entrance to the Gulf. Soon he refurbished it into a larger, modern port—this was close to the timing of the European inquiries into buying silk in the Gulf.⁴⁹ The port was renamed Bandar Abbas, for the Shāh. Efforts to redirect silk trade from the Ottoman outlets to the Gulf had minor success but, ultimately, failed for two reasons. First, ‘Abbās’s administration took a short-term gain approach, over-pricing its product for the English and Dutch markets he targeted.⁵⁰ His focus on maximizing profit—however shortsighted—was necessary to maintain the army that protected ‘Abbās from both internal and

46 Black, *The history of Islamic political thought* ch. 22; Axworthy, *A history of Iran* ch. 4.

47 Matthee, Was Safavid Iran an empire? 248.

48 Matthee, *The politics of trade in Safavid Iran* 101–2. The re-discovered and now partly published text is Khuzani Isfahani, *Azfal al-tavārikh*, iii, fols. 405b and 406a.

49 Matthee, *The politics of trade* 93–9.

50 Ibid. 231–42.

external enemies. Second, the Armenian community in New Julfa, which by this time had developed political and economic leverage of its own, resisted this geographic shift in the silk trade. After ‘Abbās died, the Armenians became more or less independent, and even signed their own trade agreement with a Russian czar. The scholarly debate about ‘Abbās will probably continue and is, of course, more nuanced than my representation here: Was he the architect of a modern state or was he simply an autocrat anxious to fund his military?

A fascinating Persian subplot surrounds the Armenian commercial network that involved merchant capital and the type of economic planning usually only ascribed to northern European trading companies.⁵¹ This network, based on “family firms” stretching from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean, and to the South China Sea, flourished and grew. Overland routes to Russia and far northern Europe also expanded and commercial treaties provided useful terms.⁵² Armenian commercial houses with roots in New Julfa appeared in Lahori Bandar, Bombay (modern Mumbai), Surat, and Goa, in addition to several in the Bay of Bengal, including Madras. Previously unused or underused records of Armenian merchants, such as widely scattered trade documents, treaties, and church records, have proven to be rich sources of information.⁵³ The core of this Eurasian community of Armenians experienced an abrupt change in the early eleventh/seventeenth century at the hands of ‘Abbās, shared in the high and low points of the Safavid economy, regained some independence, and came to a tragic demise at the hands of Nādir Shāh Afshār in 1160/1747, who executed several Armenians and destroyed New Julfa shortly before his assassination at the hands of his own bodyguard. A few Armenians remained in or returned to New Julfa, but many relocated to Madras (now Chennai) on the east coast of India, where they continued to function as merchants. Instead of rebuilding the large, nearly global network around a new hub, they turned their attention and their profits to the cause of Armenian nationalism.⁵⁴ Their collective enterprise between 1013/1604 and 1160/1747 produced impressive Asian and global source materials.

Beyond modes of production, trade, and the pooling of capital, historians are also examining cultural fusions in every direction in the western Indian Ocean region during the early modern period. Architecture, shipbuilding techniques, harbor technology, navigation, weaponry, clothing, cuisine, *patois* and

51 Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean* 1–7.

52 Ibid. 82–3, 145.

53 Ibid. xvi–xviii and 307–13. In his preface, Aslanian comments on the inaccessibility of some existing records.

54 Ibid. xv–xvi.

loan words, and literary and religious tropes all contribute to a better understanding of exchange, long-distance family and business ties, and mobility. A rich, complex example of this type of research should suffice to illustrate cultural fusion.

The early modern ports on the African side of the Red Sea, the coasts of the Gulf, and the ports of Gujarat, including Mughal Surat, shared a practice of engaging in business in the homes of merchants rather than in caravanserais or khans.⁵⁵ The ground floors of such homes opened onto streets and typically were used for conducting business and warehousing goods, while upper floors served as living quarters. This usage distinguished the buildings from inward-facing courtyard homes typical in much of the non-coastal Middle East. In addition to surviving buildings of this type, the evidence for their existence are archaeological as well as textual and oral historical accounts.⁵⁶

Merchants who could afford to do so were likely to maintain houses in ports where they traded on a regular and substantial basis. Many lived more or less permanently in a “foreign” port, like the Indians did in Muscat and the Arabs and Persians did in Surat or Bombay. There was good reason for this, as the idiosyncratic monsoon system of the Indian Ocean necessitated long stopovers while merchants and crews waited for the seasonal winds to change.⁵⁷ Well-off merchants who could afford residences away from their original homes were in a position to influence the domestic architecture of the distant ports.

The wealthy, in addition to ordinary seamen, were involved in the spread and modification of clothing and cuisine in this distinctive region:

Trade is not merely an economic activity. The commodities exchanged have considerable social and cultural as well as economic significance ... [C]olorful sarongs from Indonesia ... have become part of the dress of men all [through] the Indian Ocean; small straw fans from Mukalla [in the Hadhramawt region of modern Yemen] for hot and humid Mombasa and Zanzibar; and Indian harem veils ... [are] popular with Somali women.⁵⁸

A good example of shared culture can be found in South Asian or Indo-Persian cuisine—often curries and biryanis—that have been transferred to Southeast Asia, the Gulf region, and from there to East Africa. On the Arab side of the

55 Um, *The merchant houses of Mocha* 152–3. Merchant homes of Jedda on the east side of the Red Sea were a variant. See *ibid.* 155.

56 *Ibid.* ch. 6, and especially 231 nn. 64–80.

57 Sheriff, *Globalisation with a difference* 14.

58 *Ibid.* 21.

Gulf, meat with a spice mix served on rice represents a local variation on biriyani.⁵⁹ While strongly spiced food dates back to antiquity, since the early modern period South Asian food has included chili peppers, which originated in the Americas, and were probably introduced to India by the Portuguese in the early tenth/sixteenth century.⁶⁰

To bring this chapter to an end, I offer the example of the Ya'rubī rulers of Oman and their expansion into the Indian Ocean in the second half of the eleventh/seventeenth and into the early twelfth/eighteenth centuries. This re-interpretation is not the result of finding new or underused sources but rather situating well-used sources outside a Eurocentric interpretation. One historian describes the Omani expansion as an "empire," his intention to surprise his readers and challenge their notion of what constitutes an empire, itself a western concept and term.⁶¹ The time period in which the Ya'rubī rulers of Oman established their empire corresponds to Awrangzib's (d. 1118/1707) ongoing warfare to save the Mughal Empire, the post-Shāh 'Abbās weaknesses of the Safavid regime, and the Ottoman Empire's loss of Hungary in battle (1094/1683) and in treaty negotiations (1098–1110/1687–99). This backdrop of imperial retrenchment makes the Ya'rubī mode of empire stand out in sharp relief. "The Omani case makes clear that when an Asian state did get involved in maritime expansion [it was] sometimes able to compete effectively with the Europeans."⁶²

In this case, one current and helpful definition of empire requires three characteristics: extensive geography that includes more than one cultural zone and more than one ecological zone; a cohesive ideology; and a sense of political hierarchy in relation to other states or principalities.⁶³ The first characteristic allows for maritime empires, the second provides a rationale or sense of purpose, and the third resonates with the Persian term *shāhanshāh* (king of kings) and the Indo-Persian concepts of *pādishāh* (lord king), and *ṣāhib-qirān* ('world conqueror who establishes universal domain').⁶⁴ According to Seydi Ali, the Ottoman naval commander and traveler discussed above, he himself persuaded Humāyūn that Suleymān the Lawgiver was *pādishāh*, and one of

59 The Arab Gulf variations are sometimes called *maqbus* or *qabsah*, referring to what can be compressed with finger and thumb to eat, but the trilateral root (q-b-s) also has the connotation "to borrow."

60 Roger, *The Middle East and South Asia* ii, 1140–51; Wilson, *Southeast Asia* ii, 1151–65.

61 Andrade, *Beyond guns, germs, and steel* 165–85.

62 Ibid. 177.

63 Subrahmanyam, *Written on water* 42–69. For an application of Subrahmanyam's definition of "empire," see Matthee, *Was Safavid Iran an empire?* 234.

64 Matthee, *Was Safavid Iran an empire?* 236.

his arguments was that Suleymān's mid tenth-/sixteenth-century domains stretched to all seven of the classical "climes," as in the first requirement for empire, above.⁶⁵

In fact, the Ya'rubī empire based in Oman fits this definition well: it was a maritime enterprise encompassing more than one cultural and ecological zones, it had a cohesive ideology in minority 'Ibādī Islam, and a sense of political hierarchy in both tribal and administrative structures. Once the 'Ibādīs had expelled the Portuguese from ports along Oman's coast and seized an unknown number of Portuguese ships, by about 1060/1650, the well-armed Omani merchants began to sail the Gulf and Arabian Sea at will, chasing Portuguese targets and attacking Portuguese coastal installations in East Africa and western India, accumulating capital along the way. At the same time, Omanis built more and larger vessels at shipyards in India, to control maritime trade routes and establish their representation and control over ports in this vast area that spanned several cultural and ecological zones, and expanded even beyond the Arabian Sea to ports on the eastern coast of India. The 'Ibādī doctrine distinguished the Omanis from their Sunnī and Shī'ī neighbors by harkening back to Arabian tribal values. The 'Ibādī component required the election to leadership (imamate) of the most learned and devout man available, regardless of tribe or family. However, removal of the Portuguese required "elections" of the most capable military leaders available within a single tribal family that could orchestrate tribal cooperation. This apparent contradiction, however, was overcome: the early Ya'rubī tribe used the banner of 'Ibādī Islam effectively and their success legitimized their reign for over a century. The first Ya'rubī leader was elected in 1033/1624; as mentioned, the main port of Muscat was taken from the Portuguese in 1060/1650; and the Ya'rubī line remained viable until about the 1140s/1730s, when conflicts in the family and the election of a rival imam from a different clan brought the dynasty to an end. The regime also benefited from a powerful anti-Portuguese sentiment that extended beyond 1060/1650. Finally, projecting power over maritime space and coastal ports employed both tribal and administrative hierarchies that funneled trade revenues, including taxes, to the center at Muscat. The Omanis set themselves apart by allocating state money for cargoes, shipbuilding and maintenance, and the acquisition of seafarers—slave and free—to man the largest fleet in the region.⁶⁶

65 Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian travels* 112–4.

66 Bathurst, Maritime trade and imamate government 94–103.

I chose the time period of this essay—a flexible early modern period between 905/1500 and 1163/1750—because the complicating factors of the industrial revolution and the imposition of the colonial powers had not yet taken place. Europeans were present in the region, but certainly not dominant. During this time frame, there was a growth in production and trade in West Asian cities, suggesting a relationship between the two; this resulted in increased exports of some commodities. Growth in production, however, could also indicate population increase or fluctuation in the market. Separating internal and external trade, and assessing the relative value of trade with Mediterranean Europe as opposed to that in the Indian Ocean, is still difficult and requires further research, not least because a healthy Ottoman internal trade used the Mediterranean to connect Istanbul, Izmir, Bursa, Aleppo, and Cairo.

The recent scholarship I have explored in this essay has led me to be more optimistic about the extent and depth of early modern Asian primary sources; it has also convinced me (to an even greater extent) that the Indian Ocean is critical to West Asia's early modern history. A number of factors convince me that early modern West Asia continued to exist (as it had from antiquity) as a sub-region of the Indian Ocean; these factors include the specific cases of Ottoman naval activity in the Indian Ocean, Cairo's adept shift from trading in pepper to coffee, the new ways of accumulating capital through trust fund investment and lending, the Persian efforts to sell silk at Bandar Abbas, the extension of the Armenian commercial networks in and beyond Asia, the deep cultural ties between the Gulf and western India, the multiple cultural fusions in everything from domestic architecture to spicy foods, and the Ya'rubī maritime empire stretching from Oman to East Africa and to India.

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